



HELP ME GROW NATIONAL CENTER

# TARGETED UNIVERSALISM

HELP ME GROW'S APPROACH TO  
ADVANCING EQUITY

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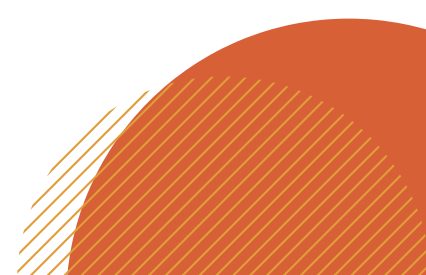
# About the Help Me Grow National Center

The Help Me Grow National Center is a national organization working to help states and communities across the country implement the Help Me Grow™ Model.

We work to provide support, resources, and tools to our National Affiliate Network in order to advance equitable, comprehensive, integrated cross-sector systems that work for and with families.

Dedicated to ensuring that early childhood systems maximize the potential of all young children, the Help Me Grow National Center is a program of the Office for Community Child Health at Connecticut Children's in Hartford, Connecticut. Connecticut Children's is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization.

Help Me Grow is a Model that works to promote collaboration across child-serving sectors in order to build a more efficient and effective system that promotes the optimal healthy development of young children. When all of the organizations working on behalf of young children work together, we can better prevent or reduce the impact that stress or adversity may have on children and families and increase protective factors that can maximize the well-being of children and families.




# Help Me Grow

## Advancing Equity through Targeted Universalism



The early childhood and system-building fields are familiar with universal policies or programs, which provide the same intervention or solution for a given population regardless of the variation, diversity, and distinctiveness that exists within that population, such as public education. The field is also experienced in the design and implementation of targeted solutions that provide an intervention to a specific group based on set criteria, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which supports families with low incomes in getting food they need. The concept of targeted universalism, introduced by John A. Powell, director of the Othering & Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley, offers an opportunity to integrate and leverage universal policies or practices that treat everyone equally and targeted ones that are distinctly effective but will not reach everyone.





Targeted universalism defines a common societal goal such as, "families with young children have the resources they want, when they want them". But instead of creating a singular strategy, intervention, or policy to achieve this goal, targeted universalism recognizes that different populations must be recognized and may need to be treated uniquely in order to achieve this common goal.

Targeted universalism suggests that everyone in society deserves a given aspiration, but recognizes that individuals are positioned differently in relationship to that aspiration and therefore, tailored approaches must be implemented in order to ensure all are able to reach it.



*This is an approach that supports the needs of the particular while reminding us that we are all part of the same social fabric. Targeted universalism rejects a blanket universal which is likely to be indifferent to the reality that different groups are situated differently relative to the institutions and resources of society. It also rejects the claim of formal equality that would treat all people the same as a way of denying difference.*

-john a. powell, Director of the Othering & Belonging Institute at the University of California, Berkeley



# What We Mean by Targeted Universalism

Within a targeted universalism framework, an organization or system sets universal goals for all groups concerned.

The strategies the organization/system develops to achieve those goals are targeted to different groups—based on how different groups are situated within structures, culture, and across geographies—to obtain the universal goal.

This is accomplished through five steps:

1. Define a universal goal
2. Measure the overall population
3. Measure a segment of the population
4. Understand group-based factors
5. Implement targeted strategies

Targeted universalism supports the needs of the particular while reminding us that we are all part of the same social fabric:

- Universal, yet captures how people are differently situated
- Inclusive, yet targets those who are most marginalized<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> powell, john, Stephen Menendian and Wendy Ake, "Targeted universalism: Policy & Practice." Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, University of California, Berkeley, 2019. [haasinstitute.berkeley.edu/targeteduniversalism](https://haasinstitute.berkeley.edu/targeteduniversalism).



Consider if society agreed on a universal goal that:

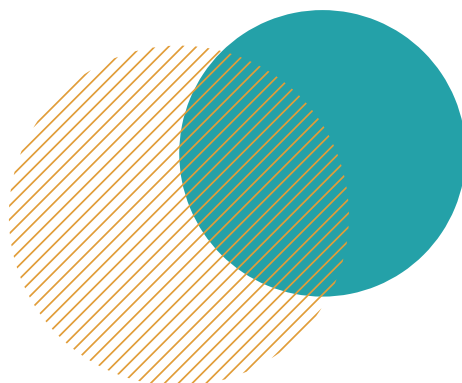


“Every child should have access to resources needed to live in good health.”

One strategy to reach that goal might be to provide everyone with health insurance regardless of ability to pay, so that everyone could afford to see a doctor.

However, giving everyone health insurance as a singular solution wouldn't address the isolation from health care facilities experienced by people living in rural areas – rural communities would need policy solutions that ensure access to health care facilities. Also, universal health insurance alone would not ensure access to plentiful, good-quality, affordable, fresh food for families that live in neighborhoods inflicted with food apartheid; additional and complementary policies would be necessary.

An array of synergistic but targeted strategies would work toward the same universal goal of ensuring everyone could live in good health. The inclusive nature of targeted universalism invites buy-in from the whole of society because everyone is included in the ultimate vision.



## Equality, Equity, & Targeted Universalism

The three concepts of equality, equity, and targeted universalism are related and overlapping but not the exact same.

Equality means allocating identical resources and opportunities to all in an effort to achieve uniform circumstances or outcomes. Equity recognizes that all people do not start from the same position and calls for resources and outcomes that meet everyone where they are in pursuit of balanced circumstances and outcomes. Pursuing equity rather than equality requires a recognition that while approaches meant for all can benefit all, a leveled playing field is needed for universal approaches to be maximized in impact.

While equity acknowledges the nuances and structural forces that contribute to an individual's starting point, it can also potentially and inadvertently be approached from a normative standpoint, where "fairness" is optimal, groups are compared against each other, the resources, circumstances, and outcomes experienced by favored groups are recognized as the standard, and competition for finite resources results.



Without intentionality and innovative thinking, equity can seek only to close disparities and can inadvertently assume that whoever is performing best at a given time defines the goal.

Targeted universalism does not assume that the outcomes for any given group necessarily represent the greatest goal, nor that equivalency is the end game.

Targeted universalism challenges all of us to envision a new definition of what it means to thrive and prosper, even for the people whose outcomes might otherwise be recognized as the goal.

Targeted universalism pursues equity by encouraging communities to strive toward ambitious but reasonable goals that would elevate everyone's position, and then digs into the real complexities within the population to identify necessary tailored solutions for varied and unique groups to achieve that ideal.







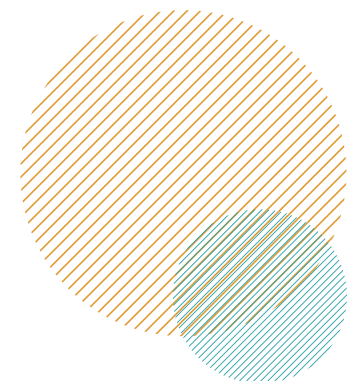
## Help Me Grow & Targeted Universalism

Targeted universalism is the approach that HMG uses to pursue equity for families with young children.

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Equity is a foundational directive for HMG's system-building approach in that while the Model aims to have all children and families connected to resources that are reflective of their needs and available when they need them, it also understands that some families need more or specialized, targeted support to reach the same goals. Targeted universalism is the strategy HMG employs to achieve equitable access to quality services for all children.

Implementing the HMG Model is an effort in advancing comprehensive, cross-sector, integrated systems that work efficiently and effectively in partnership with families to promote the health and well-being of all young children. Such ambitious systems can only be achieved when there is fair and just access to opportunities that recognize and build on each child's unique set of individual and family strengths, cultural background, home language, abilities, and experiences.




<sup>2</sup> NAEYC, Advancing Equity Initiative, <https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/initiatives/equity>, 2022.

# Help Me Grow & Targeted Universalism

Targeted universalism is a central strategy of the HMG Model, as it provides communities and states the infrastructure to pursue universal outcomes for families with young children through the implementation of targeted strategies, appropriate and unique to each community in which HMG exists. HMG is available to all families and also focuses on reaching, serving, and advocating on behalf of families who have historically been marginalized and denied access.

Using targeted universalism as its strategy to pursue equity for families with young children, HMG aims to realize a universal goal:



All families with young children have easy and quick access to the resources and services they want and need in order to best support their children's development, health, and well-being.

HMG provides all families with a comprehensive, cross-sector, integrated early childhood system that connects together all service professionals, child health providers, and families in order to advance developmental promotion, early detection, referral, linkage, and follow-up.

HMG is accessible to all families within a community or state and also designs and implements specific approaches that work best to engage, partner with, and serve the distinct and unique families that live in a particular community or state

Targeted universalism offers a useful tool for the early childhood system-builder's toolbox, especially adding value in three ways:

**Proactively Framing the Conversation:** Because targeted universalism starts with the important step of setting a universal goal, this process gives stakeholders the opportunity to set the narrative around the bigger picture of healthy child and family development. Setting the frame for early childhood system-building that, “All families with young children have easy and quick access to the resources and services that what they want and need to optimally support their children’s development, health, and well-being” sets the stage for each HMG system to identify populations where this does not hold true.

**Coalition-Building:** Targeted universalism provides the opportunity to create a broad coalition of partners that are committed to the universal goal. Groups operating outside of early childhood system-building can provide meaningful partnership based on their agreement that, “All families with young children have easy and quick access to the resources and services that what they want and need to optimally support their children’s development, health, and well-being.” Broader coalitions may be especially necessary when faced with strong opposition to an important targeted strategy.

**Identifying Inequity and Pursuing Anti-Racist Policy:** Targeted universalism requires drilling down and understanding how particular groups are impeded from reaching the stated universal goal. HMG can leverage data collected through HMG infrastructure and partnerships to identify where and to what extent concepts such as race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, disability, and economic status are impeding families in reaching the universal goal. This information, paired with intentional family partnership, can guide effective, meaningful policy change efforts.

