Marketing to Address U.S. Health Disparities: Policy Actor’s Use of Targeting

Abstract

A primary public health goal in the U.S. involves eliminating the health disparities that exist between groups. In response, policy actors work to design and implement policies and programmatic interventions that are targeted to disparate groups. Although necessary for achieving health equity, the use of targeting as a policy tool carries the potential for backlash, which may influence if and how policy actors use it. In this research, we examine policy actor perspectives on the use of targeting in the health policymaking process. We conduct elite interviews with policy actors to understand the use of targeting within the context of the evolving public health response to the obesity epidemic and obesity disparities. Our findings identify key tensions and trade-offs faced by policy actors related to targeting and reveal sociopolitical influences that shape whether and how targeted programs are considered, developed and implemented. We discuss the implications of our findings for the use of targeting and related marketing practices by policy actors to address obesity, related disparities and other significant public health concerns.