The spectrum of urban living conditions is reflected in the health of a city’s residents. Despite the wide disparities in health outcomes that stem from differential circumstances, few countries routinely examine such inequities within or between cities.

The Urban Health Equity Assessment and Response Tool (Urban HEART) helps urban policymakers, communities and other stakeholders better understand the local socio-economic factors that influence health outcomes. Developed by the World Health Organization (WHO), Urban HEART is designed to tackle urban health inequities – avoidable differences in health that are socially produced rather than biologically determined. The tool serves to identify and correct policies that perpetuate these inequities – for instance, the higher rates of illness and death among the children of families in urban poverty than among those born into relatively affluent homes.

Urban HEART provides local and national authorities with the evidence they need to set priorities, allocate resources and mobilize urban communities to promote health equity. To determine which interventions are likely to improve health and reduce inequities, this evidence seeks to show not just the immediate causes of disease but also the ‘causes of causes’ – underlying social hierarchies and the resulting conditions in which people grow, live, work and age.

Reducing health and social inequities is complex. Implementation of Urban HEART focuses on local solutions that engage all stakeholders, consider existing interventions and are effective and sustainable over time.

The tool is based on three essential elements:

- Sound evidence: reliable, representative and comparable data, disaggregated by sex, age, socio-economic status, major geographical or administrative region, and ethnicity, as appropriate.
- Intersectoral action for health: building relationships beyond the health sector in order to influence a broad range of health determinants – in particular, working with other government sectors (e.g., education, transport and public works), community groups and non-governmental organizations.
- Community participation: involving community members in all aspects of the process, from planning, designing and implementing interventions to helping ensure that these efforts are learned from and sustained beyond the initial phase.

Urban HEART revolves around a planning and implementation cycle comprising four phases: assessment, response, policy and programme. Monitoring and evaluation take place during each phase.

Urban health inequities are identified in the assessment phase. Evidence gathered at this stage forms the basis for raising awareness, determining solutions and promoting action.

**Figure 4.1. Urban HEART planning and implementation cycle**

Source: WHO Urban HEART.