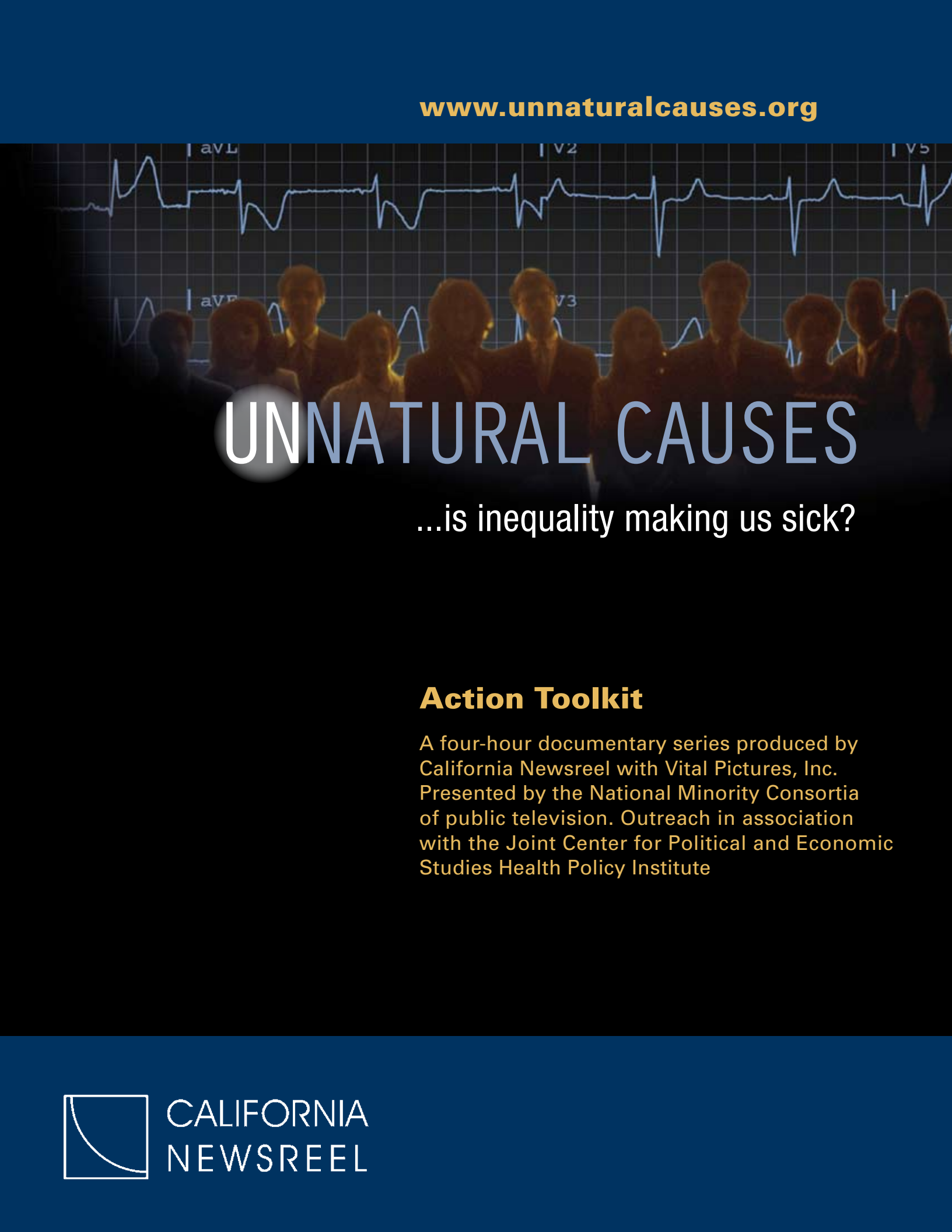


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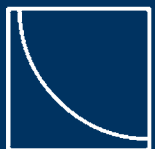


UNNATURAL CAUSES

...is inequality making us sick?

Action Toolkit

A four-hour documentary series produced by California Newsreel with Vital Pictures, Inc. Presented by the National Minority Consortia of public television. Outreach in association with the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies Health Policy Institute



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Letter from the Executive Producer

It often appears that we Americans are obsessed with health. Media outlets trumpet the latest gene and drug discoveries, dietary supplements line shelf after shelf in the supermarket, and a multi-billion dollar industry of magazines, videos and spas sells healthy “lifestyles.” We spend more than twice what other rich countries spend on average per person on medical care.

Yet we have among the worst health outcomes of any industrialized nation and the greatest health inequities. It’s not just the poor who are sick. Even the middle classes die, on average, almost three years sooner than the rich. And at each step down the class pyramid, African Americans, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders often fare worse than their white counterparts. Interestingly, that’s not the case for most new immigrants of color. Recent Latino immigrants, for example, though typically poorer than the average American, have better health. But the longer they live here, the more their health advantage erodes.

We produced *UNNATURAL CAUSES: Is Inequality Making Us Sick?* to draw attention to the root causes of illness and to help reframe the health debate in America. Economic and racial inequalities are not abstract concepts; they hospitalize and kill even more people than cigarettes. The wages and benefits we’re paid, the neighborhoods we live in, the schools we attend, our access to resources, and even our tax policies all have an impact on our health.

But social inequities – and their health consequences – are not natural or inevitable. Changing policies and practices can help improve outcomes and save lives. Other nations have already made such changes and now enjoy longer, healthier lives as a result.

We hope that UNNATURAL CAUSES and its companion tools, like this toolkit, will help you tackle health inequities by bringing into view how economic justice, racial equality and caring communities may be the best medicines of all. .

Larry Adelman
Executive Producer
December 2007

Using the Series

What You'll Find Here

The UNNATURAL CAUSES documentary series can help you promote health equity in the following ways:

Educate

- Raise awareness about the extent and cost of health inequities
- Track their root causes to inequities in other aspects of our lives
- Demonstrate that it doesn't have to be this way, that we as a society can make different policy choices

Organize

- Get people involved and eager for change
- Strengthen organizational capacity and readiness to tackle health inequities
- Reach out and build alliances with other organizations, agencies, and communities
- Connect people to opportunities to advance health equity

Advocate

- Draw attention to innovative, community-based initiatives for health equity
- Bring mobilized constituencies together to educate public officials and the media and to press for specific policy changes



This toolkit provides facilitation tips, background, sample agendas, and guidelines for planning an effective screening – one that not only deepens understanding of issues but serves as a step towards further involvement. It has been designed to help you:

1. Assess and strengthen internal capacity for tackling health inequities;
2. Set goals and develop a clear organizational framework;
3. Plan events that highlight promising practices and offer opportunities for audience members to get involved and take action.

Please note: This toolkit is meant to be read linearly, from beginning to end, before scheduling your event.

Additional resources are available at www.unnaturalcauses.org, including these essential companion materials:

- UNNATURAL CAUSES Discussion Guide: suggested pre- and post-viewing activities, comprehension and discussion questions for each program, and practical follow-up actions
- UNNATURAL CAUSES Policy Guide: suggestions for eliminating inequities across sectors
- **Advocating for Better Policies and Planning for Media Advocacy:** resources developed by The Praxis Project to help organizations plan and implement strategies for policy change and bring media attention to their work.