



**CMB FOUNDATION
SOUTHEAST ASIA**

**CALL FOR APPLICATIONS:
THE EQUITY INITIATIVE
2027-2028 FELLOWSHIP**

WHO WE ARE

Launched in January 2016 by the CMB Foundation, the Equity Initiative is CMB's flagship regional program dedicated to advancing health equity in Southeast Asia and China. The Equity Initiative reflects a long-term commitment to strengthening leadership, collaboration, and collective action for fairer and more equitable health systems across the region.

At the heart of the Equity Initiative is the Equity Initiative Fellowship, also known as the Atlantic Fellows for Health Equity in Southeast Asia (AFHESEA). The Fellowship brings together outstanding professionals from diverse and vitally relevant sectors who have demonstrated a strong commitment to leading change for health equity. It is designed as a transformative leadership experience that supports Fellows to deepen their understanding of health equity, strengthen their leadership practice, and build meaningful connections across countries, sectors, and disciplines.

Beyond the Fellowship's induction-year experience, the Equity Initiative continues to support a growing regional community of Equity Fellows committed to collective leadership and equity-focused action. After completing the induction year, Fellows also join the global Atlantic Fellows community, expanding opportunities for continued learning, collaboration, and impact across Southeast Asia, China, and beyond.



A photograph of a man with glasses and a brown polo shirt speaking into a microphone. He is smiling and looking towards the audience. In the foreground, the backs of several audience members' heads are visible, some with their hands raised. The setting appears to be a conference or meeting room with a modern, paneled wall.

WHY HEALTH EQUITY

Health equity goes beyond health and the health sector. Social determinants of health like equitable jobs, education, housing, food and diet, and transnational forces are all important drivers of equity in health. Equity in health is a major challenge all over the world, but especially so in economically dynamic Southeast Asia and China.

We care about inequities in health as a moral and ethical challenge, rather than a technical challenge. Southeast Asia and China confronts many health equity challenges which includes issues outside of healthcare such as structural and political determinants, environmental degradation, and armed conflict. Health equity challenges also include issues such as ensuring universal access to primary health care, developing pro-equity health financing policies, training workers who will serve the poor and disadvantaged, tackling the pressing health issues of women and children, migrants and refugees, ethnic minorities, the poor and disadvantaged, and those ravaged by humanitarian crises.

"Equity lenses became integrated into all of ThaiHealth's work processes. We don't just look at reducing the country's smoking rate by a certain percentage, but we look at gaps between population groups. There's an equity lens governing almost everything."

WHY LEADERSHIP

We believe that leaders in society can either perpetuate or worsen inequities, or effect change for the better. Leadership and a community of practitioners are critically important to not only bring regional attention to health equity but also to motivate, innovate, and craft solutions.

The Equity Initiative's goal is that the Fellows will become transformational leaders who can guide, direct, and influence others to bring about fundamental changes for health equity.



"Seeing how diverse leaders diagnose problems, mobilize resources and adapt solutions in different contexts expanded my imagination and gave me concrete models to emulate. I now lead with a more inclusive mindset, drawing on multiple strategies to ensure that marginalized voices shape both the vision and execution of every initiative."



THE FELLOWSHIP INDUCTION YEAR

Fellows in the Equity Initiative Fellowship participate in a fully funded, immersive learning experience that combines six weeks of in-person learning events with blended online engagement. The program is designed to cultivate leadership for health equity across Southeast Asia and China.

Through a carefully paced blend of in-person and online learning, Fellows build a shared foundation in health equity leadership while expanding their regional and global perspectives on the social, economic, political, and structural determinants of health. The program also explores why these determinants matter for policy, financing, service delivery, community voice, and systems change.

“EI’s training and exceptional field activities prompted me to think more deeply about equity in the context of rare diseases, ultimately motivating me to pursue further studies. I now feel I possess the theoretical foundation to articulate and implement equity-driven initiatives more effectively.”

The learning journey begins in the region, expands to a global vantage point, and then returns to the region to consolidate learning and application. This intentional arc strengthens peer relationships, creates varied opportunities for experiential learning, and keeps Fellows’ attention firmly grounded in the inequities shaping health and well-being across the region.

Guided by the “Know, Do, Be” framework, the EI Fellowship curriculum provides essential knowledge, builds core competencies, and inspires a lasting commitment to health equity. Fellows develop a rigorous understanding of equity concepts and systems thinking (Know); practice and apply these concepts through tools, labs, experiential learning, and problem-solving exercises (Do); and internalize a purpose-driven leadership stance through reflection, leadership communication, and exposure to models of public leadership (Be).

The fellowship induction year is grounded in the following learning objectives:

- Fellows will deepen their understanding of the social determinants of health and the structural barriers that contribute to health inequities.
- Fellows will develop advanced leadership skills that are essential for driving positive systems change.
- Fellows will engage in critical discussions with renowned experts, thought leaders, and fellow change-makers to foster cross-sector collaboration and exchange of ideas.
- Fellows will explore innovative actions aimed at promoting health equity, dismantling systemic barriers, and enhancing access to quality services for underserved populations.
- Fellows will have the opportunity to build a regional network of transformative leaders who are committed to advancing social justice in health.
- Fellows will benefit from a rich learning community that offers peer support, cross-cultural insights, and shared experiences grounded in the diverse realities of Southeast Asia.



“The design of the Induction Year was exceptional. The six learning events in one year added more to my life learning than my entire MBA program. True understanding of equity requires deep immersion in real contexts.”

Fellows can expect a collaborative and inclusive environment that nurtures meaningful connections within a diverse cohort, provides exposure to pressing health equity challenges, and facilitates engagement with leading thinkers and practitioners.

Fellows will have the opportunity to conceptualize and co-design a group project aimed at advancing health equity in their own communities, laying the foundation for sustained impact beyond the fellowship induction year.

A photograph showing three people in a meeting. On the left, a man in a green shirt and dark pants stands looking towards the center. In the middle, a man with glasses, wearing a white shirt and dark pants, holds a microphone and speaks. To his right, a woman in a black top and a patterned skirt holds a small booklet or card. They are standing in front of several whiteboards on easels. The background is an orange wall with a light fixture.

"My leadership moment came when I realized that public health work goes beyond following plans. It requires guiding people through uncertainty, earning trust, and making decisions when there is no perfect answer. I understood that leadership is not defined by authority, but by accountability."

BEYOND THE FELLOWSHIP YEAR: LIFELONG LEARNING AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

The Equity Initiative Fellowship is designed as a lifelong commitment to learning, leadership, and action for health equity. After completing the Induction Year, Fellows join the Equity Community, a growing regional network of more than 230 Fellows across Southeast Asia and China who continue to collaborate, learn, and lead change beyond their individual fields and institutions. They also become part of the Atlantic Fellows Global Community, connecting with Fellows worldwide who are advancing equity, justice, and social change.

A key part of this journey is bridging learning and action. In the second year of the Fellowship, Fellows translate the knowledge, relationships, and leadership practices developed during the Induction Year into equity-focused projects and collaborative action. These projects provide opportunities to deepen leadership practice, test ideas, and respond to equity challenges in communities and wider systems.

The Equity Community connects Fellows through global and regional partnerships and shared thematic areas across cohorts, countries, and sectors. These platforms enable Fellows to exchange knowledge, build strategic relationships, develop regional perspectives, and identify opportunities for collaborative action on complex health equity issues.





The Equity Initiative also continues to support Fellows in building the leadership competencies needed to move from learning to action. Through ongoing leadership development opportunities, peer learning, and applied practice, Fellows strengthen their ability to work across systems, engage diverse stakeholders, communicate with purpose, and lead collaborative efforts for health equity.

Collaborative initiatives are further supported by CMB Foundation's support through convenings, working groups, peer learning opportunities, and targeted grantmaking. These forms of support help Fellows and partners move from shared concern to collective action, strengthening ideas, relationships, and initiatives that can advance health equity across the region.

Together, these efforts reflect the lifelong purpose of the Equity Initiative: to nurture Fellows as equity leaders, sustain a vibrant regional community, and support collaborative action toward fairer, healthier, and more inclusive societies in Southeast Asia and China.



CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

The Equity Initiative accepts applications for the Fellowship program annually. Applications are now open, with successful applicants informed by **December**.

APPLICATION PROCESS

The Equity Initiative Fellowship follows an annual application cycle:

15 JUNE 2026	Applications open
1 AUGUST 2026	Step 1 applications close
31 AUGUST 2026	Full applications close
SEPTEMBER 2026	Application screening and shortlisting
OCTOBER 2026	National Committee meetings for country-level candidate assessment and interviews
NOVEMBER 2026	Regional Selection Committee meeting for final selection of the new cohort
DECEMBER 2026	Finalists notified
JANUARY 2027	11th cohort of EI Fellows announced
MARCH 2027	First Fellowship learning event commences

ELIGIBLE REQUIREMENTS FOR INDIVIDUAL CANDIDATES

Applicants must:

- Have a track record of demonstrated leadership and commitment to equity and social justice.
- Have at least 6 years of professional working experience and accomplishment related to health, social development, governance and law, environmental justice, or other relevant fields.
- Be a resident citizen of one of the Southeast Asian countries or China.
- Be proficient in spoken and written English.

SELECTION CRITERIA FOR COHORT

- A strong leadership potential to make a meaningful impact in their field.
- A clear, long-term vision for driving systems change to advance health equity.
- A diverse mix of Fellows from a wide range of professional expertise.
- Achieve a balanced cohort of Fellows for optimal multi-national and multi-sectoral peer learning.
- Capacity to participate fully in the fellowship activities on specific dates with the support of current employer or home institution if applicable.

To apply, please visit

<https://www.equityinitiative.org/fellowship-program>





The Equity Initiative is a
program of CMB Foundation

www.equityinitiative.org
info@equityinitiative.org