



Explanatory Metaphor

Keys to Oral Health

A metaphor for systemic barriers to oral health



The story you're telling:

Accessing good oral health is like going through a series of locked doors. Some people have the keys to unlock every door, while others are missing some or all of them. They can't access oral health no matter how hard they try.



Strategically redirects thinking away from patterns such as:

- Health Individualism
- Three Simple Things
- Cultural Stereotypes



Concepts and ideas included in this frame element:

- **Systemic influences.** There are systemic barriers and solutions to oral health, and the solutions we need go beyond brushing, flossing, and visiting the dentist.
- **Collective responsibility.** We all have a responsibility to promote oral health. If we do, we our entire society will benefit.
- **Disparities.** Access to oral health is about much more than willpower and individual choice. It is about access to systemic factors that influence oral health outcomes.



Use this frame element to avoid these unproductive beliefs:

- **Health Individualism:** Individuals—not society—determine their health outcomes through choices, drive, and willpower.
- **Three Simple Things:** Solutions to poor oral health relate to self-care: brushing, flossing, and visiting the dentist on a regular basis.
- Stereotypes about certain groups that disproportionately experience poor oral health.



When applying this frame element, keep these user notes in mind:

- Use examples of systemic influences on oral health, such as access to fluoridated water, nutritious food, and dentists who accept various kinds of health insurance. Specific examples help people understand the systemic causes of oral health and see systemic solutions as reasonable and feasible.



Value

Responsible Management

Why does it matter? What's at stake?



The story you're telling:

Using our nation's resources wisely means making smart decisions now to avoid problems later. By making sure that all communities have strong prevention efforts in place and access to oral health care, we can reduce costs by stopping problems before they start.



Strategically redirects thinking away from patterns such as:

- Health Individualism
- Us vs. Them



Concepts and ideas included in this frame element:

- **The value of thrift:** We need to use our public resources efficiently and effectively.
- **Systemic influences:** Oral health inequities are not just a problem that affects “other” people, but one that has consequences for our whole society.
- **The value of prevention:** When we fail to support oral health prevention efforts, people end up with unnecessary problems that often become serious and expensive to treat.



Use this frame element to avoid these unproductive beliefs:

- **Health Individualism:** The belief that individuals—not society—determine their outcomes through choices, drive, and willpower.
- **Us vs. Them thinking:** The belief that when society allocates resources to one group, other groups lose out.



When applying this frame element, keep these user notes in mind:

- **Responsible Management** is particularly effective when paired with economic arguments that address avoidable costs, which are more effective than arguments focusing on workforce participation.
- Pair cost-avoidance arguments with **Responsible Management** to prevent people from blaming those without coverage for driving up costs for “the rest of us.”



Value

Targeted Justice

Why does it matter? What's at stake?



The story you're telling:

In oral health care, a one-size-fits-all approach rarely works. People have different needs when it comes to their oral health, and different situations call for different responses.



Strategically redirects thinking away from patterns such as:

- Health Individualism
- Separate Fates
- Fatalism



Concepts and ideas included in this frame element:

- **Justice.** We can create a more just and fair society if we make sure our health system allows people to get the kind of care they need to support good oral health.
- **A just system.** A just system is one in which all people have the supports they need to access oral health care. This system recognizes specific needs and accommodates them to support oral health. A one-size-fits all approach doesn't work.



Use this frame element to avoid these unproductive beliefs:

- **Health Individualism:** The belief that individuals—not society--determine their outcomes health outcomes through choices, drive, and willpower.
- **Separate Fates:** The belief that the fates of individuals and groups aren't connected or shared.
- **Fatalism:** The belief that social problems are too big and intractable to solve.



When applying this frame element, keep these user notes in mind:

- **Targeted Justice** is useful when communicating about oral health inequities, particularly those that involve race and socioeconomic status.
- Use specific examples, like differential access to care at locations that are near public transit, to dentists who can accommodate different work schedule, to help people understand why different people have different needs.
- Left unframed, data about disparities may lead to assumptions that poor outcomes are due to poor choices on the part of those experiencing problems.