

Last Friday, the White House Council on Environmental Quality released its long-awaited [Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool](#). The screening tool will guide the Biden Administration's implementation of its [Justice40 Initiative](#) that directs that 40 percent of certain federal investment programs benefit disadvantaged communities. However, [like many legal scholars predicted and the White House foreshadowed](#), the screening tool does not include race as an indicator, which has raised criticism.

Why does this matter? Similar tools, including [CalEnviroScreen](#), the State of California's disadvantaged communities screening tool, do not include race as an indicator.

It matters because the failure to include race leaves out one of the most powerful predictors of environmental harm and poor health outcomes. Repeatedly, analyses demonstrate that hazardous environmental conditions, vulnerability, and [poor health outcomes](#) correlate with race. This includes exposure to [air pollution](#), toxics, lower [tree canopy](#), and overall [wellbeing](#).

The [Health in All Policies Task Force](#) convenes California State agencies and departments to leverage existing programs and policies to support the social determinants of health. After a decade of work, citing the persistence of race as a factor in determining poor health outcomes, task force conveners launched a racial equity training pilot program for State agencies in 2018. Now a standing effort, the [Capitol Collaborative on Race and Equity](#) leads California State agencies through comprehensive training to develop and implement Racial Equity Action Plans that advance racial equity in agency programs, policies, and operations. This is a step to get at the root causes of racial inequity.

The argument goes that tools like the Climate and Economic Justice Screening tool do not include race because they include other indicators that correlate with race. However, this is the exact reason we need to explicitly include race in these assessments. The inclusion of race is necessary to ensure that we consider and address directly the root causes of the conditions that lead to disparities in pollution exposure, vulnerability, well-being, and opportunity.