

SkinnyTrees: Lift Health for All is a podcast from the Center for Health Equity Transformation (CHET) at Northwestern University hearing voices from the research and community world with a focus on health equity. Conversations and interviews will discuss the importance of achieving health equity, highlighting health disparities, and exploring innovative ways to improve health for all. Through podcasting, the research team is exploring ways to present research information, ideas, and pathways that are more accessible for people from various backgrounds. Research shows that the use of storytelling formats such as podcasting is a more receptive way to introduce complex issues or scientific content.¹

Presenting our research findings and discoveries through podcasts enables the audience to access this information in a more user-friendly format. Using podcasting to communicate health equity research and engage the broader community and may also inspire others to join the conversation. This will encourage community partnerships building through collaboration and mutual understanding. Our goal is to create a more open and accessible academic center using alternative communication and outreach methods.

Using podcast episodes, social media, and website content as tools of communication, we seek out members of the community, academic researchers, scientific experts, and community leaders to amplify their voices. We aim to deliver our content on a regular basis with monthly episodes with an average duration of 45 minutes. Distribution channels include “podcatchers” such as iTunes, Google Play, Spotify, Stitcher, and through methods such as social media posts, website content, e-newsletters, and networks. SoundCloud hosts podcasts, they track metrics of downloads, listens, shares, and other digital engagements.

Since 2016, we have accrued over 10,000 social media interactions and over 1,300 listens and downloads. Our listenership has dramatically increased since the launch of CHET in 2019. Although podcasting can reach more people outside of academia with research findings and health equity efforts, there is a limitation in reaching populations who are not up-to-date with technological trends. Podcast listening also excludes people with disabilities such as hearing impairments. There is a lack of podcast’s findability within podcast applications and directories; it is also difficult to measure its search volumes and searchable keywords for qualitative evaluation. When distributing information via podcasts there is the downside of limited interactivity between the listener and the content creator.

Using podcasting to tell the stories of community members, researchers in an approachable way is helping to lift the voices for those not usually included in academic settings and helps bridge the gaps between community and research. By highlighting the root causes of inequities and connecting with people outside the academic walls, we spotlight topics and issues that matter, and prompt listeners to take action. We want to serve as an entry point for communities to engage with academic partners in a non-traditional way. Next steps include increasing ways to promote listenership, increasing accessibility by including episode transcripts, and exploring other episode formats. In order to ease limited interactivity we plan to increase social media and website engagement with listeners. Further building connections and increase interactions.

¹ Lynn M. Harter (2019) Storytelling in Acoustic Spaces: Podcasting as Embodied and Engaged Scholarship, *Health Communication*, 34:1, 125-129, DOI: [10.1080/10410236.2018.1517549](https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2018.1517549)