

KNOWLEDGE TO ACTION BRIEF

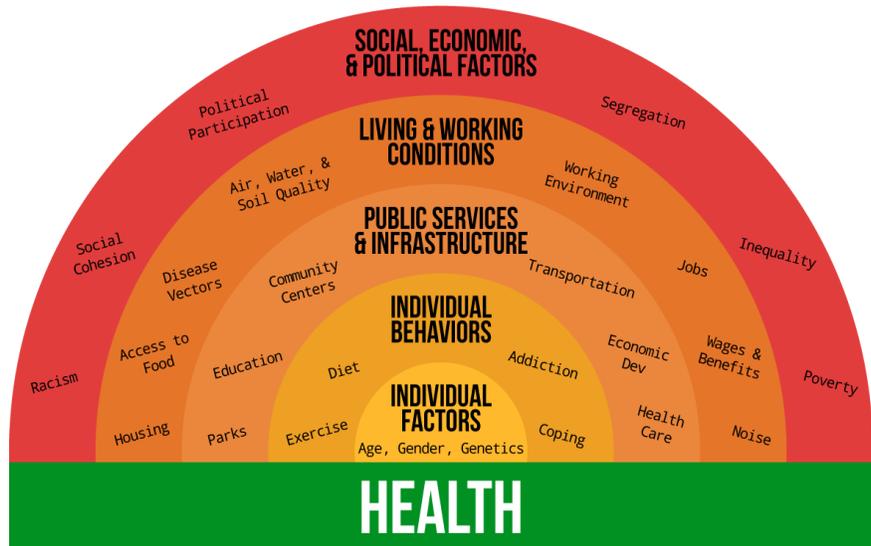
Equity and the Social Determinants of Health



Why do some individuals experience more positive health outcomes than others? The answer lies not only in genetics, personal choices, or luck, but rather a complex mix of factors within the circumstances of a person's life. These factors, termed "social determinants of health (SDOH)" are defined as "conditions in the environments in which people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks" (U.S. Department of Health and

Human Services, 2019, Understanding Social Determinants of Health section, para 1). The World Health Organization (WHO) adds that "these circumstances are shaped by the distribution of money, power and resources at global, national, and local levels" (WHO, 2019). The concept of SDOH argues that some people are healthier than others not only because of individual behaviors and biology, but also because they have certain social and environmental advantages

that allow them to achieve and maintain good health. However, while SDOH is a common working term for specified conditions, the word "determined" does not mean that one has a fixed destiny.



Source: <https://www.communitypoweredchange.com/values-guiding-principles-frameworks>

Social Determinants of Health include:

- *Economic Stability* – employment, food insecurity, housing instability, poverty
- *Education* – early childhood education, enrollment in higher education, language and literacy
- *Social/Community Context* – civic participation, discrimination, incarceration, social cohesion
- *Health and Healthcare* – access to healthcare, access to primary care, health literacy
- *Neighborhood and Built Environment* – access to healthy food, levels of crime and violence, housing quality (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019)

All of the above conditions may intersect to have a significant impact on a person's health. For example, an individual living in poverty may experience chronic stress that negatively affects their mental and physical well-being. Additionally, low income neighborhoods often lack safe places for children to play, parks for families to enjoy, or access to stores selling nutritious food, and other health benefits that residents of more affluent neighborhoods enjoy. Thus, though this individual may be motivated to do all the "right things" to stay healthy, such as getting regular check-ups and eating well, certain conditions in one's external environment, including safety concerns or community violence, could make these choices challenging.

As illustrated above, not everyone has the same access to conditions that contribute to good health, and many struggle to escape circumstances that contribute to poor health. For this reason, it is important to take action to increase equity among individuals and social groups. Equity is defined as "just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential" (Collective Impact Forum, 2015, Part 1 section, para.11).

As family strengthening workers aim to support family well-being, they have an important role to play in addressing social determinants of health and improving equity. To fully understand and address challenges facing families in maintaining optimal health, workers should focus not only on individual and interpersonal functioning but also on environmental and societal barriers. Utilizing their knowledge of these inequities, workers can then advocate for families and support them in advocating for themselves to increase their inclusion in the community, ability to access resources, and opportunities for growth and development.

Take Action

- 1) Reflect on your work with families and how their identities, circumstances, and environments affect their ability to improve their functioning and well-being. Use these insights to identify resources and support they may need to overcome barriers and build on existing strengths with encouragement, optimism and belief in their potential.
- 2) Learn strategies to advocate for families (see Resources) and provide information on these strategies to support families in advocating for themselves to promote equity. For example, support parents in organizing together to ensure safe pathways to school and lighted sidewalks.
- 3) Enroll in Strategies 2.0 trainings to learn more about how to effectively support families in reaching their goals. Find out more at StrategiesCA.org/trainings.



Strategies 2.0

Strategies 2.0 is a multi-dimensional initiative to help professionals and organizations make a bigger impact.

We train, support, and link professionals and organizations together to more effectively support families as well as build power to advance equity and opportunity in our communities.

Resources

The Community Toolbox – Step-by-step guides for improving communities. See sections “Implementing Promising Community Interventions” and “Organizing for Effective Advocacy” for techniques to advocate for community change and improved opportunities, resources, and services. <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents>

The Accountable Health Communities Health-Related Social Needs Screening Tool – a survey that can be used to assess a person’s social and environmental challenges. <https://innovation.cms.gov/Files/worksheets/ahcm-screeningtool.pdf>

References

Collective Impact Forum. (2015). Equity Matters in Collective Impact Part 1: Keynote Address by Angela Glover Blackwell. Retrieved from: <https://www.collectiveimpactforum.org/blogs/1/equity-matters-collective-impact>

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