# Social Determinants of Health

**What are the social determinants of health?**

The social determinants of health are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, age and die, including the health system. These circumstances are shaped by the distribution of money, power, and other resources at global, national and local levels. The social determinants of health are mostly responsible for health inequities – the unfair and avoidable differences in health status seen within and between communities (Adapted from: World Health Organization, 2008).

**What are health disparities?**

Health disparities are avoidable differences in health that result from cumulative social disadvantage. Specifically, "…the differences in disease risk, incidence, prevalence, morbidity, and mortality and other adverse conditions, such as unequal access to quality health care that exist among specific population groups in Connecticut." Population groups "may be based on one or more of the following statuses:  racial, ethnic, age, gender, refugee/immigrant, limited English proficiency, low socioeconomic, sexual or gender minority, disability, homeless, mental illness, veteran, incarcerated, and geographic area of residence. These vulnerable populations are considered DPH "priority" populations"(Connecticut Department of Public Health, 2016).

**What are health inequities?**

Health inequities are unfair and avoidable difference in health status seen within and between communities (Adapted from: World Health Organization, 2008).

**What is health equity?**

Equity in health refers to how uniformly services, opportunities and access are distributed across groups and places, according to the population group. Equity in health implies that ideally everyone could attain their full health potential and that no one should be disadvantaged from achieving this potential because of their social position or other socially determined circumstance. Efforts to promote equity in health are therefore aimed at creating opportunities and removing barriers to achieving the health potential of all people. It involves the fair distribution of resources needed for health, fair access to the opportunities available, and fairness in the support offered to people when ill (Adapted from the World Health Organization Concept Paper as cited by the American Medical Student Association, n.d.).

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**What is an equity lens?**

An equity lens is the perspective through which one views conditions and circumstances to understand who receives the benefits and who bears the burdens of any given program, policy, or practice (Adapted from CommonHealth ACTION as cited by Connecticut Department of Public Health, 2015).

"The social determinants of health (SDOH) are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, age and die, including the health system. These circumstances are shaped by the distribution of money, power, and other resources at global, national and local levels. The social determinants of health are mostly responsible for health inequities – the unfair and avoidable differences in health status seen within and between communities."  (Adapted from: World Health Organization, 2008).

**Examples of Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) – Healthy People 2020**

US DHHS Healthy People 2020 lists major social determinants of health (SDOH) grouped into five categories:



Do not feel limited by this list; rather let it be a starting point for critical thinking on what SDOH may affect the populations you serve/work with. For example:
- Neighborhood and the Built Environment – What are the key characteristics of safe homes and neighborhoods?
- Health and Health Care – How does our health/medical care system (primary care and hospital care) support (or not support) healthy communities?
- Social and Community Context – What types of social relationships and community networks nurture healthy communities?
- Education – How does the educational system support (or hinder) healthy children?

- Economic Stability – What are the underlying components of a strong economy in our communities? How do these components support physical and mental health?

**Social Determinants of Health – Some Considerations for Public Health Programs**

Instructions: In thinking about your own DPH program, use the following questions to consider what SDOH affect your work, desired outcomes and/or the people you serve, and *how* they affect them.

1. Who is the target population for your program?
2. What are the interventions and/or desired outcomes of your program?
3. What social factors/conditions may hinder the desired interventions and/or outcomes?
4. What physical or community factors/conditions may hinder the desired interventions?
5. What are the specific characteristics/concerns/beliefs of the target population?
   a) How might these hinder or contribute to the desired interventions and/or outcomes?
   b) How can we best use these as strengths, while identifying potential challenges?
6. What are the overarching (structural, political, economic, social) factors or systems that might support or oppose the desired interventions and/or outcomes?
   a) Is there a way to work within or around these factors?

**Additional Reading on the Social Determinants of Health –** Please see the Publications and Resources page in the DPH Health Equity Toolkit

**References**

Connecticut Department of Public Health. 2016. *Health Equity Policy and Procedures*. Hartford, CT: Connecticut Department of Public Health (Accessed 10/21/16).

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