

Multiple factors determine health, including individual traits, the community where individuals work and live, environmental constructs, and variety of social determinants. A community health needs assessment is an integral component and function of public health. The 2002 Institute of Medicine report states that “communities are both the physical and cultural settings for and – through their residents and community-based organizations – participants in action to promote the public’s health.”¹

WHAT IS PUBLIC HEALTH?

Public health is the art and science of protecting and improving the health of communities through education, healthy lifestyle promotion, provision of needed services along with disease and injury prevention. Public health is what we do as a society to ensure that people are healthy and its overall priority is to protect the health of the population through prevention.

Public health supports the infrastructure that keeps communities safe and healthy. Public health services focus on prevention versus treatment, and may go unnoticed for their value to a community; however, they help assure the health and well-being of communities.

Public health services support established public health systems which include “all public, private, and voluntary entities that contribute to the delivery of essential public health services within a jurisdiction which ensures that all entities’ contributions to the health and well-being of the community are recognized in assessing the provision of public health services.”² The public health system includes multiple entities, such as local level public health agencies, healthcare providers, and local organizations including: human service and charity, education, recreation, economic, and environmental organizations.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE PUBLIC HEALTH

It is important to remember the public health is focused on the health of a population. And within those populations, multiple factors exist which affect the public health of a community. The Socio-Ecological Model is one theory that is often used to explain the levels of influence that affect community health. Figure 1, illustrates the five levels that are important to address collectively, to garner community health behavior change and improvement. “This model serves as a reminder to think about all levels of influence that can be addressed to support long-term, healthful lifestyle choices.”³

THE FOUNDATION OF PUBLIC HEALTH

The foundation and purpose of public health is defined by three core functions: assessment, policy development, and assurance. Community health needs assessments (CHNAs) provide information for identifying local strengths and needs, health priorities, policy formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. To support a healthy community, communities can be guided by the National Prevention Strategy, Figure 2, and the 10 Essential Public Health Services framework, Figure 3, which defines local public health activities. “In 1994, the United States Public Health Service identified ten essential public health services, starting with community assessment.”¹

The National Prevention Strategy was developed in 2011 as a result of the Affordable Care Act legislation passed in 2010. The Strategy was created by the National Prevention Council to help “realize the benefits of prevention

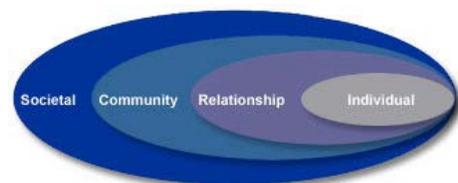


Figure 1. Socio-Ecological Model³

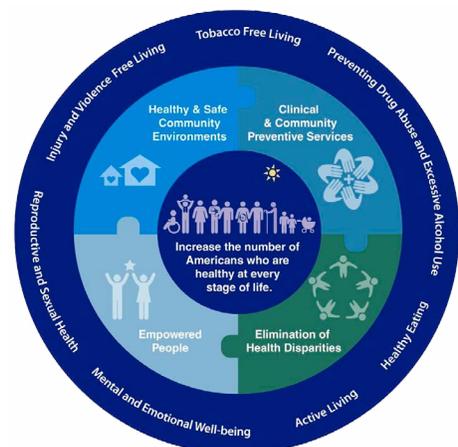


Figure 2. National Prevention Strategy

for all Americans' health", and building on the ACA efforts to lower health care costs, improve quality of care, and increase access to care.⁴ The vision of the Strategy is "Working together to improve the health and quality of life for individuals, families, and communities by moving the nation from a focus on sickness and disease to one based on prevention and wellness."⁴ Years of data and evidence-based practices has identified that preventative actions are integral to addressing and improving the health of Americans'.

The National Prevention Strategy framework identifies four Strategic Directions and seven priorities that support the goal to "increase the number of Americans who are healthy at every stage of life." The framework components identified in Figure 2 recognize that efforts to prevent disease and injuries requires the need for healthy communities, including community environments, clinical-community linkages, community health advocates, and elimination of health disparities. To support building healthy communities, the Strategy also recognizes health priorities for communities to address through those Strategic Directions in efforts to improve community health related to chronic disease prevention and control.

The Ten Essential Public Health Services are organized in a framework whose principles address the public health model which focuses on prevention at the population level, versus the medical model which focuses on treatment of an individual. The following characteristics describe the public health model:



Figure 3. Ten Essential Public Health Services

- A primary focus on the population versus individuals
- A public service ethic, tempered by concerns for the individual
- An emphasis on prevention and health promotion for the whole community
- The paradigm employs a spectrum of interventions aimed at the environment, human behavior and lifestyle, and medical care⁵

Public Health Professionals are an important factor in addressing community health and consist of a cadre of persons with diverse professional training, such as social workers, nurses, education, and community-based workers. Due to the varying degree of skilled training among public health professionals, they all share a common purpose and collaborate to promote public health in their community guided by the 10 Essential Public Health Services.

Through the collaboration of public health professionals, community health coalitions, and community members partnering to assess the health of the community they live in, the 10 Essential Public Health Services are independent yet complementary goals for communities to work toward. If feasible, implementing the services simultaneously in a community supports the mission of public health.



HOW DOES PUBLIC HEALTH RELATE TO COMMUNITY HEALTH?

Since the recognition of the value of public health practice, there have been ten great achievements in the 20th century which have contributed to addressing and improving population health. Achievements including, a decline in deaths from coronary heart disease and stroke, safer and healthier foods, and recognition of tobacco use as a health hazard have contributed to improving chronic disease prevention and control. The achievements occurred as a result of common public health practices, such as health promotion and education, supporting a healthier environment, increases in nutritional content in foods, and modification of chronic disease risk factors along with increased access to care.

Promoting public health in your community includes a prevention approach to targeting the whole population. As you assess the health of your community, the Essential Public Services framework can serve as a guide to help you understand what your community is doing to promote and support local public health efforts to prevent and control chronic disease. Some examples of activities to address essential services in your community include; collaboration with private health care providers and health insurers to manage integrated information systems and monitor the health status to identify community health problems; and convening community groups to adopt specific preventive programs to identify and solve health problems.

The Institute of Medicine Committee on Assuring the Health of the Public in the 21st Century recognized that the collective existence of multiple factors affect and determine the public health of a community. The committee also supported “that the health of populations and individuals is shaped by a wide range of factors in the social, economic, natural, built, and political environments.”⁶ The future of public health is dependent on a strong governmental public health infrastructure. Figure 4 illustrates a framework developed by the IOM which identifies the components necessary to supporting a strong public health system. A strong community infrastructure and public health system to support local public health is integral to identifying sustainable strategies to improve chronic disease prevention and control.



Figure 4. The public health system: government and some potential partners⁶

CONCLUSION

Community structure and patterns influence individual health behavior, therefore positive changes within a community are crucial to support public health, including policy, systems, and environmental changes to improve chronic disease prevention and control. A comprehensive community health needs assessment is an integral component and function of addressing community health.

Resources

Public Health and the Community

[What is Public Health?](#) Association of Schools of Public Health

[The Public Health System and the 10 Essential Public Health Services.](#) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[The Future of the Public's Health in the 21st Century.](#) Committee on Assuring the Health of the Public in the 21st Century, Institute of Medicine

[National Prevention Strategy.](#) United States Department of Health and Human Services

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