

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the definition of health is “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”<sup>1</sup> While the definition has not been amended since 1948, the WHO also recognizes that children across the world have dramatically different life chances depending on where they are born. Those life chances are determined by multiple factors, including one key factor, individual health status. The status of health is also determined in part by social factors which influence individual health. Social factors such as economics and income equality, education, social inclusion and support, racial or ethnic bias, cultural factors, geography, and access to quality services and resources; are prevalent influences on health and life expectancy and considered “Social Determinants of Health.”

## Approach to Social Determinants of Health

“We must be proactive, collaborative, inclusive, and deliberate as we advance the use of social determinants approach to reducing health inequities among and between populations.”

*(David Satcher, MD, PhD,  
Former US Secretary of Health)<sup>2</sup>*

## WHAT ARE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH?

Social Determinants of Health refer to circumstances “in which people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, function, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks.”<sup>3</sup> The World Health Organization recognizes that these circumstances are in turn shaped by a wider set of forces: economics, social policies, and politics.<sup>2</sup> Access to and the availability of resources to enrich quality of life, as well as the social engagement and health behavior patterns of local residents are affected by where they live. Factors that define social determinants of a community’s health may often be unique to that local area or population.

## WHY ARE SOCIAL DETERMINANT OF HEALTH IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER?

Broadening our understanding of the relationship between the factors that affect individual health is crucial to addressing the social determinants of health and reducing health disparities. At a community level it may be hard to influence all factors that affect its health, however depending on the desired changes, some factors may be addressed more effectively. For example, a small community workgroup might have more opportunity to influence social inclusion and support, since “collective action can influence both social ties and the experiences of changing communities and systems.”<sup>3</sup>

There are a myriad of reasons why addressing social determinants of health is important to the Community Health Needs Assessment process, including the following:

- Deal with the source of the issue in efforts to solve or prevent a long term problem.
- Addressing the source of the issue increases the likelihood of addressing the issue in the interim.
- Dealing with underlying social factors may be more effective to addressing an issue.
- Addressing the social determinants of health in community is integral in understanding how to determine appropriate action to targeting them.
- Provides an opportunity to learn about the community’s social determinants of health and develop community leadership.

## WHO SHOULD ADDRESS SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH?

Just as the Community Health Needs Assessment process relies on community collaboration and partnerships to understand community health needs, strengths, and resources; relying on those same partnerships, as well as community stakeholders, is crucial to understanding the Social Determinants of Health that affect the community. The community workgroup can be the driving force for determining what information needs to be collected, however other community members, including policy/decision makers, can provide the support and resources necessary to address local issues. More importantly, involving



Figure 1. Social Determinants of Health Framework  
Source: Healthy People 2020

community residents directly affected by the social determinant(s), can offer great insight into the issue and possible reasons for why it exists.

### FRAMEWORK FOR ADDRESSING SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH?

There are various frameworks that exist to define the factors that comprise the social determinants of health in a community.

The Healthy People 2020 developed a “place-based” framework (Figure 1), identifying five areas that define the social determinants of health. The five areas reflect a variety of components that comprise the factors that define the scope of the Determinants, such as poverty, employment status, educational level, social support, access to health care, environmental conditions, neighborhood safety, and access to healthy foods and physical activity opportunities.<sup>2</sup>

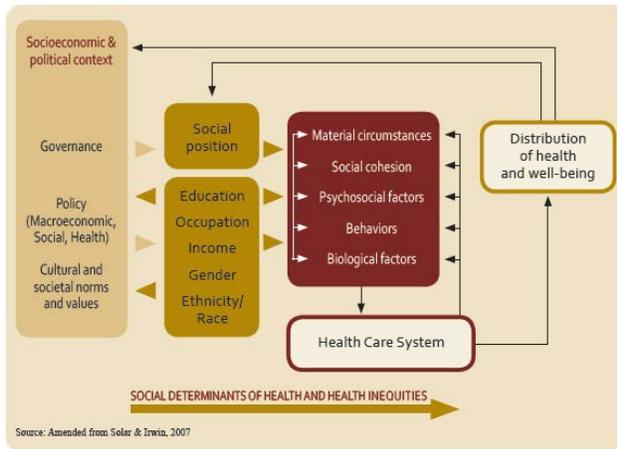


Figure 2. WHO Social Determinants of Health and Health Inequities<sup>4</sup>

This framework provides a baseline for communities to work from to help identify local issues and understand how they correlate with one another.

The WHO created the Commission on Social Determinants of Health, who commissioned a conceptual framework that describes relationships among individual and structural variables (Figure 2).<sup>4</sup>

As your workgroup conducts a community health needs assessment, understanding the framework of social determinants of health will provide an opportunity to identify how social factors may affect local chronic disease prevention and control. The purpose of the assessment is to identify community health needs, strengths, and resources,

as well as strategies to identify social determinants of health and development. Designing and utilizing specific data collection methods that help identify determinants can serve as an integral component supporting the CHNA process. This data is sometimes referred to as demographic data which provides a description about the community and should be considered as important indicators which determine community health.

### SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH IN SOUTH DAKOTA

In South Dakota (SD) communities, there are various factors that encompass their social determinants of health, including, but not limited to geography, income, culture, race/ethnicity, social support, and access to care. Prevailing factors that make SD unique, but also contribute to poor health status regarding chronic disease prevention and control, include the racial distribution of White’s and American Indian’s. American Indian’s comprise the largest minority population in the state and are affected by various factors that compromise their health, including poverty for counties in or near AI reservations. The state’s AI population is also disproportionately affected by diabetes and heart disease at a marked higher rate when compared to the state.

SD’s rural geography also greatly impacts access to health care services. The majority of SD counties are considered medically underserved areas and have larger proportions of older residents who require ongoing access to health care. In the past, SD adults have reported a marked low consumption of fruits and vegetables, as well as low physical activity levels.

Each South Dakota community has unique factors that affect its health and chronic disease prevention and control. It is important to consider and assess what those factors are and how they affect community health so that appropriate action can be taken to address them.

## CONCLUSION

Understanding the core issue of why these determinants exist, will support a comprehensive community health needs assessment. Utilizing a collaborative and participatory approach among your community workgroup, provides a greater likelihood of understanding the local social determinants of health. "A community health needs assessment will help you understand what the social determinants are in a particular case."<sup>5</sup> Asking the right questions to determine the factors that comprise the social determinants of health will help create a community health profile. Addressing all factors that affect community health will help establish a healthier community.

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## Resources

Refer to the following resources for further information on addressing the Social Determinants of Health specific to your community.

### Social Determinants of Health

Community Health Assessments and Community Health Improvement Plans for Accreditation Preparation Demonstration Project Resources for Social Determinants of Health Indicators. National Association of City and County Health Officials.

Addressing Social Determinants of Health and Development. The Community Toolbox, University of Kansas.

Promoting Health Equity: A Resource to Help Communities Address Social Determinants of Health. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

## References

1. Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19-22 June, 1946; signed on 22 July 1946 by the representatives of 61 States (Official Records of the World Health Organization, no. 2, p. 100) and entered into force on 7 April 1948.
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3. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Healthy People 2020. (2013, April 10). Social Determinants of Health. Retrieved from <http://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topicsobjectives2020/overview.aspx?topicid=39>
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5. Rabinowitz, P., Holt, C. (2013). Chapter 17. Analyzing Community Problems and Solutions, Section 5. Addressing Social Determinants of Health and Development. In The Community Tool Box, University of Kansas website. Retrieved from [http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/chapter17\\_section5\\_main.aspx](http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/chapter17_section5_main.aspx)

