

Determinants of Health

Each determinant influences health and is important in its own right.

At the same time, the determinants are inter-related.

The combined effects of these determinants together influence health status.

Following are the commonly recognized Determinants of Health:

Income and Social Status

- ▶ Income and social status have the most important influence on health. These determinants impact a person's access to housing and food, and their sense of control over life decisions. Health status generally improves as a person's income and social status increase. The healthiest societies have an equitable distribution of wealth.

Social Support Networks

- ▶ Social support from families, friends and communities contributes to better health and acts as a buffer against sources of stress and health problems. Social support networks help individuals solve problems, deal with adversity, and maintain a sense of control over life circumstances.

Education and Literacy

- ▶ A person's health improves with higher levels of education and literacy. Education and literacy contribute to health by equipping a person with knowledge and skills for problem solving. Education and literacy also increase opportunities for job and income security, and improve a person's ability to access and understand information to help keep them healthy.

Employment and Working Conditions

- ▶ A person who has more control over their work circumstances and fewer stress-related demands in their work and activities tend to be healthier and often live longer than those in unsafe, riskier or stressful work and activities.

Social Environments

- ▶ The values and norms of a society influence the health and well being of people and communities in varying ways. Social stability, recognition of diversity, safety, good working relationships, and cohesive communities also contribute to a healthy social environment.

Physical Environments

- ▶ The natural environment, which includes the quality of air, water and soil, directly influences health. The human-built environment, which includes housing, workplaces, and road design, also influences health.

Personal Health Practices and Coping Skills

- ▶ Individuals can take action to help prevent diseases and promote self-care, cope with challenges, develop self-reliance, solve problems and make choices that enhance health.

Healthy Childhood Development

- ▶ Experiences in early childhood influence health throughout the life span. All of the determinants of health affect the physical, social, mental, emotional and spiritual development of children and youth.

Biology and Genetic Endowment

- ▶ A person's genetics predispose them to developing certain diseases. Biology influences a person's response to sources of stress, such as viruses or emotional strain.

Health Services

- ▶ Health is also influenced by having access to services that are structured to maintain and promote health, prevent disease, and restore health and functioning.

Gender

- ▶ The way a person experiences health issues is influenced by their gender-based social status or roles. Men and women do not have equal roles, power or influence in society. Measures to address inequity and bias associated with gender can improve health.

Culture

- ▶ Cultural values, language and beliefs influence a person's understanding of health and health-related behaviours. Dominant cultural values can create or maintain conditions such as marginalization, stigmatization, loss or devaluation of language and culture, and lack of access to culturally appropriate health care and services.

