

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

Neighborhood and Built Environment

The neighborhoods people live in have a major impact on their health and well-being. Many people in the United States live in neighborhoods with high rates of violence, unsafe air or water, and other health and safety risks. Racial/ethnic minorities and people with low incomes are more likely to live in places with these risks. Interventions and policy changes at the local, state, and federal level can help reduce these health and safety risks and promote health.

How Providers Can Help

ACCESS TO FOODS THAT SUPPORT HEALTHY EATING PATTERNS

Access to foods that support healthy eating patterns contributes to an individual's health throughout his or her life. Healthy eating can help lower the risk for chronic disease.

Another barrier to accessibility of healthy food choices is living in a "food desert." In food deserts, food sources are lacking or limited, particularly in low income areas that are more also likely to have a higher share of convenience stores and small food markets

Affordability also influences access to foods that support healthy eating patterns.

Studies show a relationship between the inability to access foods that support healthy eating patterns and negative health outcomes. For example, a study of 40,000 California residents examined how access to healthy food choices impacts rates of obesity and diabetes.

Residents of neighborhoods with fewer fresh produce sources and plentiful fast food restaurants and convenience stores were at a higher risk of obesity and diabetes.

QUALITY OF HOUSING

Housing quality refers to the physical condition of a person's home as well as the quality of the social and physical environment in which the home is located. Aspects of housing quality include air quality, home safety, space per individual, and the presence of mold, asbestos, or lead. Housing quality is affected by factors like a home's design and age.

Families with low income may be more likely to live in poor-quality housing that can damage health. For example, spending time in a cold home may raise blood pressure or even lead to a heart attack. In addition, residents of overcrowded homes may be at risk for poor mental health, food insecurity, and infectious diseases. Additionally, the homes of families with low income are more likely to have water leaks; these leaks are associated with mold growth, which has been shown to affect respiratory health and increase the likelihood of asthma, coughing, and wheezing.

CRIME AND VIOLENCE

Crime and violence experienced by individuals living in a community is an important public health issue. People can be exposed to violence in many ways. They may be victimized directly, witness violence or property crimes in their community, or hear about crime and violence from other residents.

Violence can lead to premature death or cause non-fatal injuries. People who survive violent crime endure physical pain and suffering and may also experience mental distress and reduced quality of life. Repeated exposure to crime and violence may be linked to an increase in negative health outcomes.

There are serious short- and long-term health effects from exposure to crime and violence in one's community. Addressing exposure to crime and violence as a public health issue may help prevent and reduce the harms to individual and community health and well-being.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

Polluted air, contaminated water, and extreme heat are three environmental conditions that can negatively impact population health. The World Health Organization attributed 11% of U.S. mortality in 2012 (nearly 300,000 deaths) to environmental causes. Identifying how environmental exposures vary by population and geographic location can improve our understanding of health disparities.

Poor water quality places the public's health at risk. Groundwater is the source of drinking water for nearly 1 out of 3 Americans, and in 1 study, 22% of public supply groundwater sources had at least 1 contaminant above recommended levels.

Humans take millions of breaths over the course of their lives, so the cumulative impact of outdoor and indoor air quality can influence health.

Air temperature is another environmental condition that affects health. According to recent reports from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), many of the hottest years on record have occurred in the past decade.

Reducing harmful environmental exposures can improve population health and may contribute to decreases in health disparities.

Resources:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program>

<https://www.hud.gov/>

<https://www.epa.gov/greenerproducts/consumer-information-greener-products-and-services>

<https://victimsofcrime.org/getting-help/>

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