

Introduction to Community Health

Introduction to Community Health

Key concepts, goals, and foundational elements for anyone studying or working in public health.

1. What Is Community Health?

Aspect	Description
Definition	The science and practice of promoting, protecting, and improving the health of groups of people who share a common geographic location, culture, or interest.
Scope	Encompasses physical, mental, and social well-being; focuses on the whole population rather than individual patients.
Core Principle	Population-based – interventions are designed to reach many people simultaneously and to address the determinants of health.

2. Levels of Prevention

Level	Goal	Typical Activities
Primary	Prevent disease before it occurs	Immunizations, health education, safe water/sanitation, tobacco control policies
Secondary	Detect disease early & limit progression	Screening programs (e.g., mammography, blood pressure checks), contact tracing
Tertiary	Reduce complications and improve quality of life	Rehabilitation services, chronic disease management programs, support groups

3. Determinants of Health

Category	Examples
Biological	Genetics, age, sex
Behavioral	Diet, physical activity, substance use
Social	Education, income, employment, social support
Environmental	Housing quality, air/water quality, built environment

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Category

Examples

Health System Access to care, quality of services, health insurance

Understanding these determinants helps planners target the root causes of health problems rather than just the symptoms.

4. Key Functions of Community Health Practice

1. **Assessment** – Collect data (surveys, surveillance, focus groups) to identify health needs and assets.
 2. **Policy Development** – Translate evidence into local policies, ordinances, or programs.
 3. **Assurance** – Ensure that needed services are available, accessible, and of high quality.
 4. **Health Promotion & Education** – Design culturally appropriate messages and interventions.
 5. **Evaluation** – Measure outcomes, process indicators, and cost-effectiveness; use findings to refine programs.
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5. Common Community Health Models

Model	Main Idea	Typical Use
PRECEDE? PROCEED	Starts with desired outcomes ? works backward to identify determinants, then implements & evaluates.	Comprehensive program planning.
Social Ecological Model	Health is shaped by multiple layers: individual, interpersonal, community, institutional, policy.	Designing multilevel interventions.
Health Belief Model	Focuses on perceived susceptibility, severity, benefits, barriers, cues to action, and self-efficacy.	Tailoring health education.
Diffusion of Innovations	Explains how new ideas spread through a community.	Introducing new health technologies or practices.

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6. Data Sources & Surveillance

Source	What It Provides	Example
Vital Statistics	Births, deaths, cause of death data	Mortality rates by disease
Disease Registries	Incidence & prevalence of specific conditions	Cancer registry
Behavioral Surveys	Health-related behaviors & risk factors	BRFSS, Youth Risk Behavior Survey
Environmental Monitoring	Air/water quality, housing conditions	EPA air quality index
Electronic Health Records (EHRs)	Clinical encounters, medication use	Chronic disease management trends

*Data must be analyzed for trends