

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 geography, culture, or interest.
Focus	Population-level outcomes (e.g., disease rates, life expectancy) rather than individual patient care.
Scope	Includes prevention, health promotion, disease surveillance, policy development, and health services delivery.
Core Principle	Health is shaped by social, economic, environmental, and behavioral factors (the <i>social determinants of health</i>).

2. Core Components of Community Health

Component	What It Involves	Typical Activities
Assessment	Collecting data on health status, risks, resources, and needs.	Surveys, focus groups, GIS mapping, health indicators.
Planning	Setting priorities, defining goals, and designing interventions.	Community-based participatory planning, logic models, SMART objectives.
Implementation	Delivering programs and services.	Vaccination drives, nutrition workshops, environmental clean-ups.
Evaluation	Measuring impact, effectiveness, and sustainability.	Process, outcome, and impact evaluations; cost-benefit analysis.
Policy & Advocacy	Influencing laws, regulations, and resource allocation.	Lobbying for smoke-free zones, advocating for safe water, drafting ordinances.

3. Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)

Introduction to Community Health

Domain	Examples	Why It Matters
Economic Stability	Income, employment, food security	Affects ability to afford nutritious food, healthcare, safe housing.
Education	Literacy, school quality, vocational training	Higher education correlates with healthier behaviors and better job prospects.
Social & Community Context	Social support, discrimination, civic participation	Strong networks buffer stress; discrimination worsens health outcomes.
Health & Healthcare	Access to care, health literacy, quality of services	Timely, affordable care prevents complications and reduces mortality.
Neighborhood & Built Environment	Housing quality, transportation, green spaces, pollution	Physical environment influences physical activity, exposure to hazards.

Public health professionals use SDOH frameworks to target upstream interventions.

4. Levels of Prevention

Level	Goal	Typical Community Interventions
Primary	Prevent disease before it occurs	Immunization campaigns, tobacco-free policies, health education in schools.
Secondary	Detect and treat early to halt progression	Screening programs (e.g., blood pressure, breast cancer), contact tracing.
Tertiary	Reduce complications and improve quality of life	Rehabilitation services, chronic disease self-management groups, home care support.

5. Key Stakeholders

Stakeholder	Role in Community Health
Residents / Community Members	Provide local knowledge, participate in decision-making, adopt healthy behaviors.
Public Health Agencies	Conduct assessments, develop policies, coordinate services.

Introduction to Community Health

Stakeholder

Role in Community Health

Healthcare Providers

Deliver clinical services, refer to community programs, report data.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Offer supplemental services, advocacy, grant funding.

Schools & Universities

Implement health curricula, conduct research, engage youth.

Local Government

Enact ordinances, allocate resources, maintain infrastructure