

Introduction to Community Health

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Key concepts, goals, and foundational principles 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.
Scope	Encompasses disease prevention, health promotion, health equity, and the social determinants that influence health outcomes.
Level of Action	Operates at the population level rather than the individual patient level.
Core Disciplines	Epidemiology, health education, environmental health, health policy, social work, and community development.

2. Core Principles

Principle	Explanation
Population-Based Focus	Interventions target whole groups (e.g., neighborhoods, schools, workplaces).
Prevention-Oriented	Emphasis on primary (prevent disease), secondary (early detection), and tertiary (reduce complications) prevention.
Equity & Social Justice	Strive to reduce health disparities linked to income, race, gender, and other social factors.
Community Participation	Residents are partners in assessing needs, planning, implementing, and evaluating programs.
Intersectoral Collaboration	Health outcomes are shaped by education, housing, transportation, agriculture, etc.; partnerships across sectors are essential.
Evidence-Based Practice	Decisions are guided by data from surveillance, research, and program evaluation.

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3. The Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)

Domain	Typical Factors	Impact on Health
Economic Stability	Employment, income, poverty, social assistance	Access to nutritious food, safe housing
Education	Literacy, school quality, higher education	Health literacy, employment opportunities
Social & Community Context	Social support, discrimination, civic participation	Stress levels, mental health
Health & Health Care	Insurance coverage, primary care access, quality of services	Preventive care utilization
Neighborhood & Built Environment	Housing quality, transportation, parks, pollution	Physical activity, exposure to hazards

Community health initiatives aim to modify these determinants to create healthier environments.

4. Community Health Assessment (CHA)

1. **Planning** – Define purpose, geographic boundaries, and stakeholders.
2. **Data Collection**
 - **Quantitative:** Vital statistics, disease registries, surveys (e.g., BRFSS).
 - **Qualitative:** Focus groups, key informant interviews, community forums.
3. **Data Analysis** – Identify trends, high risk groups, and gaps in services.
4. **Prioritization** – Use criteria such as severity, feasibility, and community preference.
5. **Reporting** – Produce a clear, visual report (maps, charts, infographics) for decision makers.

Result: A data-driven foundation for program design and resource allocation.

5. Program Planning Frameworks

Framework	Steps (simplified)

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PRECEDE?	1?? Social assessment 2?? Epidemiologic assessment 3?? Behavioral & environmental assessment 4?? Educational & ecological assessment 5??
PROCEED	Administrative & policy assessment ? Implementation, process evaluation, impact evaluation, outcome evaluation.
Logic Model	Inputs ? Activities ? Outputs ? Short?term outcomes ? Long?term outcomes.
Health Impact Pyramid	(Bottom?up) Socio?economic interventions ? Changing the built environment