

# SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

*Catherine M. Boyle*

## BRIEF BACKGROUND

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*The social determinants of health (SDOH) refer to the social and physical conditions that individuals were born and raised in, and the conditions that individuals lived, worked, and aged in that has shaped their health. The graphic below shows the place-based SDOH framework of Healthy People 2020 (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2020).*



## ECONOMIC STABILITY

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**Social determinants in this area include:**

- Employment

- Food security
- Housing stability
- Poverty

**To consider how economic stability has impacted your health consider the following:**

- *Are you economically stable enough to buy your next meal?*
- *Would you be able to pay for an unexpected medical bill without jeopardizing your other monthly payments?*
- *Can you afford to cover the costs of your basic hygiene needs (e.g. shampoo, toothpaste, feminine products, etc.)?*

## **NEIGHBORHOOD AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT**

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**Social determinants in this area include:**

- Access to healthy foods
- Crime and violence
- Environmental conditions
- Housing quality

**To evaluate your neighborhood and the built environments in your life, consider this:**

- *Do you have a grocery store within 5 miles that you could buy fresh produce in?*
- *Are you scared to go on walks in your neighborhood due to drug and/or gang activity?*
- *Is your water safe to drink?*

## **HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE**

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**Social determinants in this area include:**

- Access to health care

- Access to primary care

**To consider how your access to health care services impacted your well-being, think of the following:**

- Do you have to travel more than 30 miles to receive primary care?
- Do you receive annual check-ups that provide you with preventative services such as flu shots, blood pressure, or cancer screenings?
- Do you have health insurance that makes your out-of-pocket medical care costs manageable?

## **SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT**

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**Social determinants in this area include:**

- Discrimination
- Incarceration
- Social cohesion
- Civic participation

**To consider how your social and community context has impacted your health, ask yourself this:**

- *Do you face discrimination for your gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, or disability on a personal or structural level that causes you chronic stress?*
- *Do you have strong relationships within your community that you could rely on if you ever became physically dependent or needed a ride to the doctor?*

## **EDUCATION**

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**Social determinants in this area include:**

- Early childhood education and development
- Language and literacy
- Graduating high school

- Enrollment in higher education

**To consider how your education has impacted your health, ask yourself this:**

- *Can you read the instructions on your medicine containers?*
- *Can you speak the same language as your doctor? Can you communicate with him/her?*
- *Would you be able to have your current job and health benefits if you dropped out of high school?*

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

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## **#1. JUMP IN AND BUILD RAPPORT**

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The first step in program development is building rapport with the site, its employees, and the people that it serves. It is crucial to establish rapport with these groups because it fosters collaboration and a deeper understanding of the site's infrastructure.

## **#2. IDENTIFY NEEDS**

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The second step in program development is identifying the site and/or the population's needs. Once rapport is established, there are endless opportunities to ask what the site and population needs. Take the time to understand the needs from multiple perspectives (i.e. site employees, population members, and credible experts) and compare it to what you thought the needs were. Then, collaborate until you find what programming works best for the site's needs and your skillset.

## **#3. CREATE MEANINGFUL AND ENGAGING PROGRAMS**

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Make the programs meaningful and engaging because you need buy-in from the program participants. If the program is not interesting, it will be more difficult to convey your message. Consider the age, culture, and relevant interests of the participants to make the programs meaningful and engaging.

#### **#4. STRIVE FOR PROGRESS, NOT PERFECTION**

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Strive for progress, not perfection. Perfection is the killer of progress.

#### **#5. TAKE CARE OF YOUR POPULATIONS**

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Finally, remember why you started: THE PEOPLE. Take care of the people that you are working for and with by respecting them, valuing them as equals, and remembering that they contribute to the program. At its core, great program development centers around collaboration.

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