

What Makes People Healthy?

Determinants of Health

1. **Income and social status:** Evidence suggests that higher social and economic status leads to better health. A higher income leads to safer housing, better education, appropriate food security and improved access to health care. Studies suggest that the distribution of income in a given society may be a more important determinant of health than the total amount of income earned by society members. Large gaps in income distribution lead to increases in social problems and poorer health among the population as a whole.
2. **Employment and working conditions:** People who have control over their work and who have less stress in their jobs are healthier than those who have stressful, unhealthy or dangerous jobs or who are unemployed.
3. **Education and literacy:** Effective education, starting in infancy and through adulthood, is a key contributor to health. Education contributes to wealth and health by equipping people with the skills needed to solve problems and have a sense of control over their lives. It also provides people with the skills needed to get a job and earn an income.
4. **Childhood Experiences (Previously Healthy child development):** The culmination of early childhood experiences shapes an individual's health and wellbeing throughout their lives. The other key determinants of health play a role in healthy child development including access to safe, clean homes, education, nutritious foods and access to medical care.
5. **Physical environments:** Contaminants in air, water and food can cause adverse health effects. Additionally, given that over 80% of Canadians live in urbanized areas and spend 90% of their time indoors, we recognize that the built environment including housing, transportation and the design of communities can impact health and safety, including physical activity and mental and social well-being.

A significant body of research points to greater physical activity and improved health for people living in denser, mixed-use neighbourhoods and for people who have access to active forms of transportation (walking, cycling, and transit).

6. **Social supports and coping skills (Previously Social Environment and Personal Health and Coping Skills):** Informal social support from families, communities and friends is associated with better health, as is a provision of formal social care and support. The caring and respect in social relationships can act as a buffer to adverse health events.

Social stability, strong social policies, and safe and cohesive communities characterize a supportive society that reduces risks to wellness.

7. **Healthy Behaviours (Previously Personal Health and Coping Skills):** Personal life choices can shape an individual's health. A growing body of evidence suggests that these life choices are often shaped by the socioeconomic and physical environments in which people live, work and play.
8. **Access to Health services:** Population health is increased with access to health services, particularly those aimed at prevention and health promotion.
9. **Biology and genetic endowment:** The basic biology and genetic make-up of an individual are fundamental in determining health outcomes for an individual and may predispose individuals to particular diseases.
10. **Gender:** Many health issues are known to be a function of gender-based social status as many health system priorities are influenced by social and cultural attitudes based on gender.
11. **Culture:** Culture shapes who we are and how we live and therefore influences our health. Some cultural groups may face greater challenges in accessing health care due to various barriers (e.g., stigmatization, stereotyping and a lack of culturally appropriate health care and services).
12. **Race/Racism** Canada is a multicultural society with the ethnic and racial makeup of its population rapidly changing. Racialized Canadians experience lower rates of income, higher rates of unemployment, and lower occupational status that threaten not only their physical, mental, and social health, but also the overall health and well-being of Canadian society.