

## Understanding the Social Determinants of Health

### *Brief Overview and Discussion Guide*

#### **INSTRUCTIONS**

This introduction to the social determinants of health aims to stimulate discussion among health care teams regarding the impact and opportunity they see in their practice and community related to social determinants. For more in-depth study, please see [Understanding the Social Determinants of Health – A Self-guided Learning Module for Rural Health Care Teams](#).

#### **DEFINITIONS – What are Social Determinants of Health?**

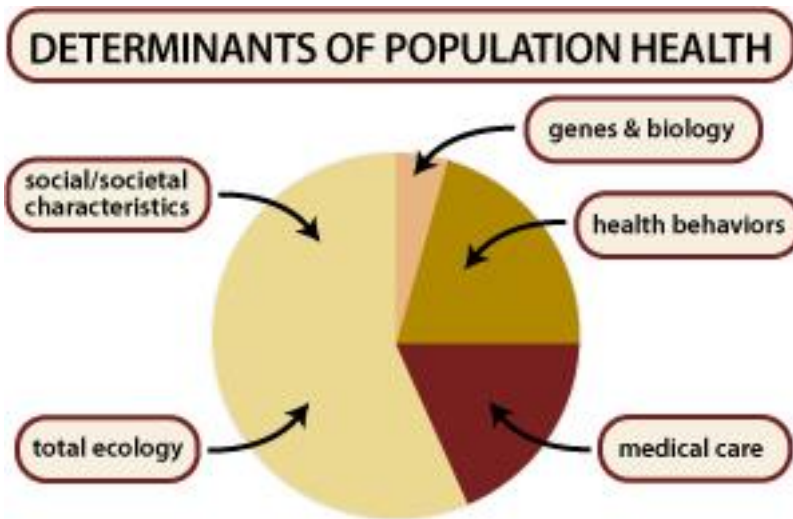
Most simply, social determinants of health are economic and social conditions that influence the health of people and communities. The below definitions give more depth to the concept:

- “The circumstances in which people are born, grow up, live, work, and age; and the systems put in place to deal with illness. These circumstances are shaped by a wider set of forces: economics, social policies, and politics.” (World Health Organization, <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/social-determinants-of-health>).
- “Social determinants of health (SDH) are the complex, integrated, and overlapping social structures and economic systems that include the social environment, physical environment, and health services; structural and societal factors that are responsible for most health inequities. SDH are shaped by the distribution of money, power and resources at global, national, and local levels, which are themselves influenced by policy choices.” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), <http://www.cdc.gov/socialdeterminants/docs/sdh-white-paper-2010.pdf>)





The chart below, from the CDC, summarizes the influence of various factors on health. Medical care, genes, and biology together account for less than 25% of the determinants of health. The other factors have to do with behavioral, social, societal, and environmental influences.



Source: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchstp/socialdeterminants/faq.html>

### VIDEO OVERVIEW

View this three-minute YouTube video that shows two young men and describes differences in their social and economic status as it relates to social determinants of health.

- Watch <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v= 11xLlwKgWc>.

### DISCUSS

- If you were to see these two young men back-to-back in the emergency department or clinic, how might you treat them differently?
- People are often told to “Pull yourself up by your bootstraps.” Is that comment realistic for Chad?
- If Chad is unhealthy due to issues beyond his control, how does that affect the health care system, the community, the nation?





- What health care system or community resources are available to Chad that might make a meaningful difference in his health and his life?
- What social determinants of health affect the people in your community or county? As a care giver, how do these factors impact your role?
- What ideas do you have about ways to address social determinants:
  - In your individual practice/patient interactions?
  - As an organization delivering care?
  - In your community?

### IDEAS FOR ACTION

The links below are examples of rural communities working to address some of these important health-related issues.

- Facebook page of a community garden sponsored by Lake Region Healthcare in Otter Tail County, Minnesota: <https://www.facebook.com/lakeregiontakesroot/timeline>
- Story about how members of the Sault Indian Tribe teamed with other community members to increase healthy lifestyles in Manistique County, Michigan: <http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/roadmaps/stories/empowering-people-and-inspiring-change-manistique-mi>
- Story about McDowell County, West Virginia, where community members teamed with health care providers to increase exercise: <http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/roadmaps/stories/mcdowell-county-community-health-center-takes-extra-step-keep-west-virginia>
- Additional examples available at County Health Rankings and Roadmaps: <http://www.countyhealthrankings.org>.

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Tell us about your rural health care delivery or financing innovation.  
Go to <http://www.RuralHealthValue.org> and click on “Share Your Innovation.”

