

Social Determinants of Health

In 2012, the city adopted its first full comprehensive plan in more than 50 years. The plan lays out a framework to become a “city that honors its past, faces and overcomes the challenges of the present, and builds assets to create a future filled with opportunity.” The 20-year framework plan is an ambitious and needed endeavor to address the city’s challenges. The plan, however, fails to include an assessment too quantitatively and qualitatively measure progress, of lack thereof, in improving health in Birmingham and each of the 23 communities in the city. To answer these questions, our project was conducted under the ethos of the Social Ecological Model (SEM).¹ Behavioral and social models and theories, have long recognized that multiple factors influence one’s ability to maintain a good quality of life. SEM is a theory-based framework for understanding the multifaceted and interactive effects of personal and environmental factors that determine behaviors, and intermediaries for health promotion. There are five nested, hierarchical levels of the SEM: Individual, interpersonal, community, organizational, and policy/enabling environment (Figure 1). These levels provide the most effective approach to public health prevention and control uses a combination of interventions at all levels of the model

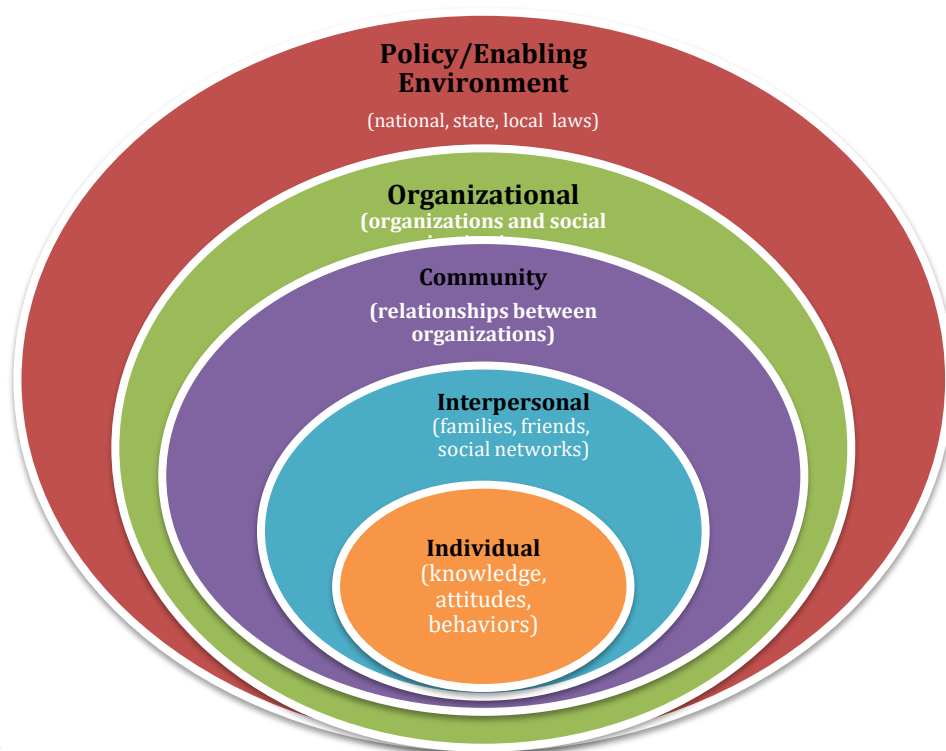


Figure 1. The Social Ecological Model

This model suggests, and subsequent evidence confirms, that simply advising individuals to engage in healthful behaviors without considering social norms for activity, health policies in place, available resources, opportunities for engaging in activity, and environmental constraints

¹ <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/overview/social-ecologicalmodel.html>

such as crime, traffic and unpleasant surroundings.¹² Therefore, creating equitable opportunities will aid in reducing inequities in health behaviors as well as promote equity in health outcomes. Hence, equity in health implies that ideally everyone should have a fair opportunity to attain his or her full health potential and, more pragmatically, that no one should be disadvantaged from achieving this potential, if it can be avoided.^{2 3}

The Social Determinants of Health (SDH) are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. The SDH are mostly responsible for health disparities or unfair and avoidable differences in health status seen between races.⁴ Healthy People 2020 is the framework for prevention efforts in 28 subject areas, to help people improve and maintain the SDH.⁵ HP 2020 has several overarching goals including:⁶

- Attain high-quality, longer lives free of preventable disease, disability, injury, and premature death.
- Achieve health equity, eliminate disparities, and improve the health of all groups.
- Create social and physical environments that promote good health for all.
- Promote quality of life, healthy development, and healthy behaviors across all life stages

The social determinants of health include: the social and economic environment, the physical environment, and a person's individual characteristics and behaviors.⁷ The relationship between the physical (i.e. the built environment) and health has been well-established. Relationships between the built environment and health differ among age groups, especially children and adults. The built environment directly or indirect encourages active lifestyles, influencing people physical, mental, social health and well-being. Built environment features that have shown to be important are distribution (i.e. number of parks and facilities to be active), aesthetics, quality of destinations, presence of greenery and perceived safety.⁸

² <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/overview/social-ecologicalmodel.html>

³ Whitehead M. The concepts and principles of equity and health. *Int J Health Serv.* 1992;22(3):429-45.

⁴ http://www.who.int/social_determinants/en/

⁵ <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/About-Healthy-People>

⁶ <https://www.healthypeople.gov/sites/default/files/HP2020Framework.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.who.int/hia/evidence/doh/en/>

⁸ <https://www-ncbi-nlm-nih-gov.ezproxy.lib.uconn.edu/pmc/articles/PMC3549251/>