



Health equity and the determinants of health

Health is influenced by a broad range of factors including genetics, individual lifestyles and behaviours, and the physical, social, and economic environments in which we live. These factors contribute to health experienced by individuals and to the overall level of health in a community or population. Factors beyond an individual's biology and behaviours – those that form the conditions in which people are born, grow up, live, and work – are known as the social determinants of health. Any differences or variations in health status between groups are known as health inequalities.

Effective public health programs and services take into account the health needs of communities, which are informed by determinants of health.

The determinants of health include:

- Income and social status
- Social support networks
- Education and literacy
- Employment and working conditions
- Social and physical environments
- Personal health practices and coping skills
- Housing
- Early childhood development
- Social inclusion/exclusion
- Access to health services
- Gender
- Culture and race
- Aboriginal status

The combined influence of the determinants of health plays a key role in determining the health status of the population as a whole.

The information contained in this fact sheet originates from the Association of Local Public Health Agencies' **2018 Orientation Manual for Board of Health Members** and the revised **Ontario Public Health Standards**.

Alternate formats of this document are available upon request.

Under the **Ontario Public Health Standards**, boards of health are required to consider the determinants of health as they plan, deliver and evaluate public health programs and services. This includes conducting population health assessments through measuring, monitoring and reporting on the status of a population's health.

Population health assessment provides the necessary information to understand the health status and needs of populations, including identification of priority populations and health inequities. A focus on health equity is important to the delivery of all public health programs and services in order to support people to reach their full health potential.

Priority populations

Priority populations face inequities in health and wellness because they may have less access to things like shelter, food, a stable income, education and other circumstances that affect a community's health and well-being. Engaging priority populations in order to understand unique needs is a requirement of the Ontario Public Health Standards. Tailoring programs and services to meet the needs of priority populations can contribute to improving overall population health outcomes.