

At-A-Glance: Public Health and Social Justice

Understanding Social Differences: How Social Justice Impacts Public Health

In recent studies over 800,000 deaths in the United States can be attributed to social inequalities (Donohoe, 2014). In comparison, heart disease, which is the leading cause of death in the United States has an average of 650,000 deaths per year (CDC, 2020). These health inequities reflect social injustice, as they are unfair and avoidable differences in health across the population, and between different groups within society (Whitehead, 1992). Simply put this means that society is not treating everyone fairly, and this is having a profound impact on our health.

Strategies

In order to assess these issues, citizens must be informed about what inequitable policies and practices help create and/or maintain unhealthy and dangerous conditions that contribute to poor health (e.g. insecure and low-paying jobs, unstable housing, environmental hazards, unhealthy land use, psychosocial stressors, rising debt, unreliable transportation, poor childcare, lack of health insurance, violent living conditions). According to the Delaware State Health Improvement Plan 2020 Annual Report, the definition of social determinants of health is most widely recognized as “conditions in which we are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, function, and quality of life (Delaware SHIP Report, 2020). These social determinants represent social identities, conditions, and circumstances that each Delaware citizen faces daily, such as neighborhood environments, educational opportunities, economic stability, social and community issues, and access to health care. Having access to health care is a fundamental right for all citizens (Delaware SHIP Report, 2020). Being informed of these issues can help us move forward in taking action on social justice and the health of our communities.

Call to action

Citizens can learn about initiatives such as [Healthy Communities Delaware](#) (HCD) that is working to promote community-led initiatives to build healthy communities and maximize impact by aligning resources to make investments more equitable and sustainable (HCD, 2021). HCD is committed to supporting long term solutions through community collaboration, embedding equity in the process, and mobilizing across sectors to advance healthy, safe and vibrant communities where every person has the opportunity to thrive (HCD, 2021). [Healthy Communities Delaware](#) supports work each community decides is most important, which may include affordable housing, food insecurity, quality education, transportation, job creation, or other areas (HCD, 2021).

Delaware citizens can also call upon local representatives and community leaders to provide resources and support for these initiatives. Likewise, Delaware citizens can speak to their community leaders to advocate for their community needs and call for equitable and fair policies and allocation of resources, as well as programs designed for and by communities most impacted by health inequities. A collection of tools and resources for addressing social determinants of health within communities can be found in the [Community Tool Box](#) developed by the Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas.



The estimated number of U.S. deaths attributed to social inequities annually is double that of U.S. COVID-19 deaths in the first year of the pandemic.

Source(s):

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