

# The “But Why?” Technique for Identifying Root Causes

## What are “root causes?”

Root causes are the basic reasons behind a problem or issue within a community.

## The “But why?” Technique

The "But why?" technique is one method used to identify underlying root causes to issues identified in communities. The "But why?" technique examines a problem by asking questions to find out what caused it. Each time an answer is given, a follow-up "But why?" is asked.

## How des the “But why?” technique work?

Consider the social determinants of health that might have influenced Sal’s condition. Using the “But, why?” technique, identify 1-3 root causes for the problem. Each time an answer is given, group

### Use the following format:

Problem:

Too many (too few) people are \_\_\_\_\_.

Q. But why?

A. Because...

Q. But why?

A. Because...

Q. Could that have been prevented?

A. Yes.

Q. How?

Q. But why?

A. Because...

Q. But why?

### Example:

Problem:

A child has an infected foot.

Q. But why?

A. She stepped on broken glass while walking.

Q. Could that have been prevented?

A. Yes.

Q. How?

A. She could have been wearing shoes

Q. But why doesn't the child have shoes?

A. Because the family can't afford shoes.

Q. But, why?