

Early Adversity and Social Determinants of Health

Knowledge to Action Brief

March, 2021

Why do some individuals experience more positive health outcomes than others? The answer lies not solely in genetics, personal choices, or luck, but rather a complex mix of factors within the circumstances of a person's life. These factors, termed Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) are defined as "conditions in the environments in which people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks".¹

The World Health Organization (WHO) adds that one's life circumstances are influenced by the distribution of power and money, as well as resources at global, national, and local levels.² The concept of SDOH holds that some people are healthier than others not just because of individual behaviors and biology, but because they have certain social and environmental advantages that allow them to achieve and maintain good health. While SDOH is a common working term for specified conditions, the word "determined" does not mean that one has a fixed destiny.

Social Determinants of Health include:

- *Economic Stability* – employment, food insecurity, housing instability, poverty
- *Education* – early childhood education, enrollment in higher education, language, and literacy
- *Social/Community Context* – civic participation, discrimination, incarceration, social cohesion
- *Health and Healthcare* – access to healthcare, access to primary care, health literacy
- *Neighborhood and Built Environment* – access to healthy food, levels of crime and violence, housing quality (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019)



¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2019). Social Determinants of Health. Retrieved from: <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-of-health>

² World Health Organization. (2019). About Social Determinants of Health. Retrieved from: https://www.who.int/social_determinants/sdh_definition/en/

All of the above conditions may intersect and have a significant impact on a person's health. An individual living in poverty may experience chronic stress that negatively affects their mental and physical well-being. Low-income neighborhoods may lack safe places for children to play, parks for families to enjoy, or access to stores selling fresh and affordable food. Quality child care may not be easily accessible or affordable and this instability creates additional stress for children and their parents or caregivers. Safety concerns and community violence may further increase the family's stress levels.

These Social Determinants of Health are closely intertwined with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) that can result in prolonged toxic stress and negatively impact an individual's lifelong health.

California's ACEs Aware initiative, has an important role to play in addressing social determinants of health, improving equity, and ultimately increasing child and family well-being. To fully understand and address challenges facing families in maintaining optimal health, health care providers must focus on ACEs screening in the context of individual and interpersonal functioning and also on environmental and societal barriers. As a community we have a shared responsibility to buffer the impact of toxic stress on children by connecting families to positive supports that build protective factors.

ACTIONS TO TAKE



Reflect on your work with families and how the social determinants in their environments may affect their lifelong health and well-being. Learn how protective factors can be strengthened to buffer the impact of risk.

<https://cssp.org/resource/protectivefactorsactionsheets/>



Continue the journey to become more ACEs Aware. Go here to get trained and certified in ACEs Screening.

<https://www.acesaware.org/screen/provider-training/>



Join your local PACEs Connection Community to exchange feedback and resources.

<https://www.acesconnection.com/>



RESOURCES

The ACEs Aware initiative features a great collection of resources, searchable by type, topic, and organization.
<https://www.acesaware.org/heal/resources/>

The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University provides a variety of great resources focused on the science of toxic stress and brain development, resilience, policy solutions, and much more.
<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/>



SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY
Social Policy Institute
School of Social Work

