The Social Determinants of Health

Introduction

Social Determinants of Health are “conditions in the places where people live, learn, work, and play [that] affect a wide range of health risks and outcomes” (CDC, “Social Determinants of Health: Know What Affects Health”). Examples of Social Determinants of Health include access to proper nutrition, ability to get an education, disparities in healthcare and the income gap.

Social Determinants of Health underlie preventable disparities in health status and disease outcomes. Poorer health outcomes are often the result of the interaction between individuals and their social and physical environments. Policies that result in changes to these environments can affect entire populations over time, while also helping people to change their individual behavior.

What Can We Do?

The Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion’s Project, Healthy People 2020, lays out five key areas that we must evaluate to address adverse Social Determinants of Health:

1. Economic Stability – we must reduce the number of those living in poverty by providing more and better employment opportunities.

2. Education – we must focus on early childhood education and development that will support better language and literacy skills and raise high school graduation rates.

3. Social and Community Context – we have to work to bring down rates of negative community factors (ex. discrimination and incarceration) and raise rates of social cohesion and civic participation.

4. Health and Healthcare – we need to better peoples’ access to healthcare (including primary care), as well as improving health literacy.

5. Neighborhood and Built Environment – we need to drive crime and violence out of neighborhoods while improving environmental conditions and access to quality housing.

References

Delaware: Gaps in Children’s Health Status. (2008). In Robert Wood Johnson Foundation: Commission to Build a Healthier America. Retrieved October 2, 2017, from commissionhealth.org

Health Disparities in Delaware. (n.d.). Retrieved September 13, 2017, from http://dehealthequityguide.weebly.com/health-disparities-in-delaware.html

Social Determinants of Health. (n.d.). Retrieved September 13, 2017, from https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-of-health

Figure 1. Within Delaware, there are many factors (family income, education and racial or ethnic group) that can impact children’s general health status. As shown in the graph, children in less-advantaged groups and families appear to be less healthy than those with greater advantages. Source: Delaware: Gaps in Children’s Health Status. (2008). In Robert Wood Johnson Foundation: Commission to Build a Healthier America. Retrieved October 2, 2017, from commissionhealth.org