

Basic Principles of
Healthy Cities:

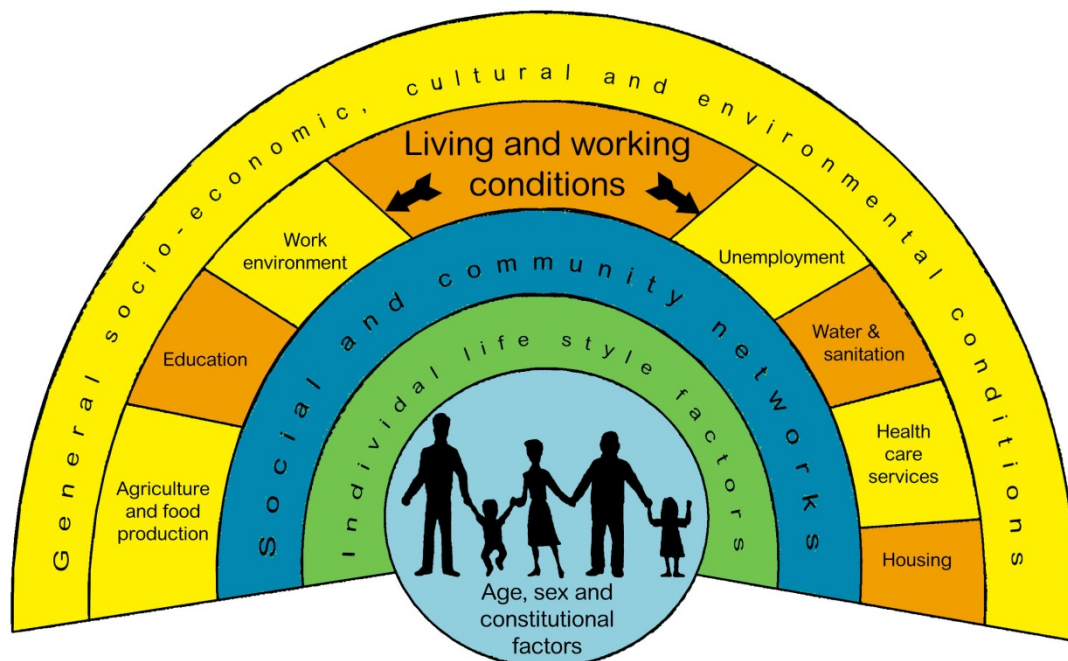
Health Determinants



WHAT INFLUENCES HEALTH?

There are many factors that influence people's health and they are known as the determinants of health. These factors are often interactive and outside an individual's control. The below diagram summarises the main determinants of health according to their spheres of influence. Starting from those at the individual level and moving through to those in the wider society.

Diagram: The main determinants of health



Source: Whitehead M. & Dahlgren G. What can we do about inequalities in health? Lancet, 1991, 338: 1059-1063.

MAIN DETERMINANTS

1. **Age, sex and genetic factors**

These inborn factors play a part in determining lifespan and likelihood of developing certain illnesses. It is completely beyond an individual's control.

2. **Individual lifestyle factors**

Lifestyle factors include diet, physical exercise, smoking, drinking and sexual behaviour, etc. Individuals may have more control over these factors by making choice to adopt a healthy lifestyle practice that enhance health.

3. **Social and community networks**

Greater support from families, friends and communities are linked with better health. The caring and respect occur in such social relationships help people to cope with challenges and act as a buffer against health problems.

4. **General socio-economic, cultural and environmental conditions**

These factors are multiple, interactive and very often go beyond the extent of individual's control. Integrated and multi-level of public health interventions are crucial to shape these factors for a positive health impacts.

- **Income and social status**

Health status improves at each step up the income and social hierarchy. Higher income and status generally results in more control and discretion. Income determines living conditions such as safe housing and ability to buy sufficient good food.

- **Education**

Health status improves with level of education. Education is closely tied to socio-economic status. It increases opportunities for job and income security, improves people's ability to access and understand information to help them keep healthy.

- **Physical environment**

Safe water, clean air, healthy workplaces, safe houses, design of communities and transportation systems all contribute to good health.

- **Employment and working conditions**

People in employment are healthier, particularly those who have more control over their working conditions. The social organisation of work, management styles and social relationships in the workplace all affect health.

- **Health services**

Access and use of services that prevent and treat disease influences health.

- **Culture**

Customs, traditions and beliefs of the family and community all affect health.

PUBLIC HEALTH INITIATIVES

In view of the diverse determinants of health, public health initiatives based on the five action areas in the “Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion” are the most effective in enabling people’s control over their health and its determinants, thereby improving health. These action areas include building healthy public policies, creating supportive environments, strengthening community participation, developing personal skills and orientating health services.

To know more on these action areas, you can refer to the leaflet:
Basic Principles of Healthy Cities: Health Promotion at
http://www.chcu.gov.hk/files/news/basic_principles_healthy_cities_eng.pdf

HEALTHY PEOPLE, HEALTHY CITY

As people’s health is influenced by a wide range of factors, which go beyond the healthcare sector; therefore, community participation and inter-sectoral cooperation are required to integrate health promotion actions and transform health determinants for the better. The healthy cities project provides an excellent platform to enable concerted effort of all sectors of the community to work together in partnership to improve health in the place where we live, work and love.

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Copies of this leaflet are available from the Community Liaison Division. Please direct request to ha2_cld2@dh.gov.hk

This leaflet is also accessible at the Central Health Education Unit's website www.cheu.gov.hk and Centre for Health Protection's website www.chp.gov.hk



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This leaflet was last updated in April 2009. For more information, please contact the Community Liaison Division of the Health Promotion Branch of the Department of Health by email at: cld@dh.gov.hk.