

Determinants of health

Our mental health is related to the determinants of health. The determinants of health are the broad range of personal, social, economic and environmental factors that determine individual and population health. They include:

1. Income and social status
2. Employment and working conditions
3. Education and literacy
4. Childhood experiences
5. Physical environments
6. Social supports and coping skills
7. Healthy behaviours
8. Access to health services
9. Biology and genetic endowment
10. Gender and gender identity
11. Culture
12. Race

Social determinants of health refer to a specific group of social and economic factors within the broader determinants of health. These relate to an individual's place in society, such as income, education or employment. Experiences of discrimination, racism and historical trauma are important social determinants of health for certain groups such as Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQ+ and Black & racialized people, among others.

Differences in the health status of individuals and groups are called **health inequities**. These differences can be due to your genes as well as the choices you make in how you live your life. However, the social determinants of health can also have an important influence on health. For example, individuals with higher incomes are often healthier than those with lower incomes.

Health inequity refers to health inequalities that are unfair or unjust and modifiable. For example, Canadians who live in remote or northern regions do not have the same access to nutritious foods such as fruits and vegetables as other Canadians.

Health equity is the absence of unfair systems and policies that cause health inequalities. Health equity seeks to reduce inequalities and to increase access to opportunities and conditions conducive to health for all.

In aspiring to become mental health literate, a basic understanding of the relationship between the social determinants of health and mental health is important. To increase your understanding, visit the following websites:

Government of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/population-health/what-determines-health.html>

Public Health Agency of Canada-Canadian Best Practices Portal: <https://cbpp-pcpe.phac-aspc.gc.ca/public-health-topics/social-determinants-of-health/>

The National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health (Canada) <https://nccdh.ca/>

World Health Organization: https://www.who.int/health-topics/social-determinants-of-health#tab=tab_1