The Societal Determinants of Health

Ellen Dybvig, Megan Fellows, Chloe Mitchell, and Emma Ostby
To begin...

What are the most important determinants of health?

Find a partner(s) sitting near to you and brainstorm together. Write down your ideas on a sheet of paper.
The Determinants of Health

“The term social determinant of health is often used to refer broadly to any nonmedical factors influencing health, including health-related knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors (such as smoking). These factors, however, represent only the most downstream determinants in the causal pathways influencing health; they are shaped by more upstream determinants.”

**Downstream social determinants:** factors that are temporally and spatially close to health effects (and hence relatively apparent), but are influenced by upstream factors.

**Upstream social determinants:** fundamental causes that set in motion causal pathways leading to (often temporally and spatially distant) health effects through downstream factors.

From “The Social Determinants of Health: Coming of Age,” published in *the Annual Review of Public Health*. 
Social vs. Societal

Social Determinants:
- Downstream determinants
- The “causes of the causes”
- Examples: stress, depression, social contact, exercise, etc.

Societal Determinants:
- Upstream determinants
- A political economy approach to health examines the role of the distribution of power and of political, economics, and social resources
- Function on multiple levels simultaneously
- “The causes of the causes of the causes” of health and disease
- Considers the political, social, cultural, and economic contexts in which disease and illness arise and examines the ways in which societal structures interact with the particular conditions or factors that lead to good or ill health
Why do we care?

“What is wrong with the individual perspective? Is it not important to live a healthy life? Of course it is, but this approach covers only one small component of multiple influences on health. It assumes that people are perfect decision makers with day-to-day control over work and neighborhood conditions, not to mention production, pollution control, trade and marketing patterns, ignoring the clear evidence that life chances are structurally constrained. Further, it places the blame on individuals for poor health, this approach removes responsibility for change from government, private business and other actors.”

-Benetar and Brock (p. 39)
Housing & Neighborhood Conditions
Water & Sanitation
Transportation
Public Health & Health Care Services

Health Bridges International
HEALTH THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS AND SERVICE
Policies and Regulations

- Poverty
- Working Conditions
- Employment
Education

Global School Attendance

Household Wealth and School Attendance
Civil Unrest and Violence

- Civil Conflict
  - Health facilities come under attack
- Corruption
- Social Injustice
Wealth Distribution

Champagne-Glass Distribution

Each horizontal band represents an equal fifth of the world’s people

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>World population</th>
<th>World income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richest 20%</td>
<td>82.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second 20%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third 20%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth 20%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poorest 20%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Social Structure

**FIGURE 3**
Infant mortality rate: deaths per 1,000 live births, by race and ethnicity
Social Structure
Militarism, Colonialism, and Imperialism
Why is it important to address the societal determinants of health?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DtU_W4FeTno
Discussion Questions

● Should we be focusing our resources on the upstream or downstream determinants of health?
  ○ What would Rawls say?
  ○ The Utilitarians?

● If you were given one million dollars, what societal determinant of health would you attempt to address? Why?

● What are societal barriers that must be overcome to achieve health equity in impoverished areas?
Bibliography

http://www.ihealthbeat.org/perspectives/2014/addressing-social-determinants-of-health-key-to-improving-health-health-care
http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2819784/