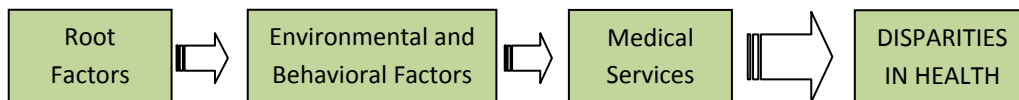


The Imperative of Reducing Health Disparities Through Prevention

By Prevention Institute

In the United States, despite improvements in overall health, minority populations continue to experience higher rates and severity of illness and death. Improving access and quality of health care is not enough to close the health gap. An emphasis on prevention at the community level is necessary for reducing disparities in health and is more cost effective than treating people after they are already sick or injured.

There are three primary elements that have been identified as contributing to the underlying reasons for inequitable health outcomes; 1) root factors (e.g. poverty, discrimination), 2) environmental (e.g. high lead rates, high rates of unemployment) and behavioral factors (e.g. activity patterns, tobacco and alcohol use), and 3) medical services (e.g. increased need for medical services and lack of access).



Prevention Institute identified 13 key community factors that can directly impact health and safety or influence behaviors that impact health and safety that address the underlying reasons for inequitable health outcomes. These factors can be organized into three clusters: equitable opportunity, people and place.

Equitable Opportunity

- Racial Justice
- Jobs and local ownership
- Education

People

- Social networks and trust
- Participation and willingness to act for the common good
- Acceptable behaviors and attitudes

Place

- Products sold & promoted (i.e. healthy foods, tobacco and alcohol)
- Look, feel and safety of neighborhoods
- Parks and open space
- Getting around
- Housing
- Air, water, and soil
- Arts & culture

Of the 5% of health dollars spent on health promotion and disease prevention, few resources are devoted to prevention initiatives that address the underlying reasons that people become sick or injured. Addressing these underlying factors at the community level is **key** to improving health and reducing disparities.

There are ten key disparity reducing strategies and issues, that incorporate the 13 key community factors, on which it is recommended that public health practitioners, advocates, and decision makers focus.

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| 1. Primary prevention | 6. Social norms change |
| 2. Underlying determinants of health | 7. Community-based participatory efforts |
| 3. The built environment | 8. Comprehensive approaches |
| 4. Sustainable agriculture | 9. Interdisciplinary collaboration |
| 5. Economic development | 10. Community resilience |

In order to address the underlying factors of inequitable health outcomes, it is essential that disparity reducing strategies focus on transforming health at the community level, building on strengths and assets within the communities. For more information, the full report is available at:

http://www.altfutures.com/DRA/DRA_Reducing%20HD%20thru%20Prx1.pdf.

“The challenge is not only to anticipate the future, but to create it.”