

MAY

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Edmonton Social Planning Council

The social determinants of health: an innovative approach

INFO SHEET

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The social determinants of health defined

- "the economic and social conditions that influence the health of individuals, communities and jurisdictions as a whole."

Dennis Raphael, Social Determinants of Health: Canadian Perspectives, 2004

- "the causes behind the causes of ill-health"

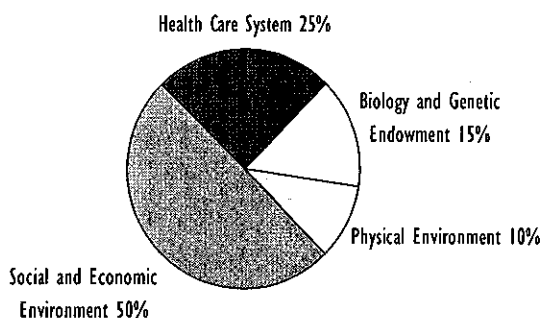
World Health Organization, 2005

The issue

The Edmonton Social Planning Council proposes a well documented, innovative approach to health care that would go a long way to moving toward Premier Klein's lofty goal of Alberta "becoming the healthiest population in Canada."

There is mounting evidence that the contribution of medicine and health care in making us healthy is quite limited. As a result, spending more on health care will not result in significant further improvements in the health of Albertans. If we really want to create the "healthiest" society then we need to be prepared to address all the socio-economic factors that contribute to our health and well-being. The Premier's drive toward health care reform will fail if the social determinants of health are ignored.

Estimated Impact of Determinants of Health on the Health Status of the Population



Source: Canadian Institute for Advanced Research; Health Canada, Population and Public Health Branch AB/NWT, 2002; also found on Alberta Health and Wellness website

"Income affects health ... people with low incomes are more likely to be heavy users of physician services, visit emergencies, be admitted to hospital, take multiple medications, and require home care services."

(Report of the Premier's Advisory Council on Health Care / Mazankowski Report, 2001)

By far the greatest share of health problems is attributable to broad social conditions. Yet, health policies have been dominated by disease-focused solutions that largely ignore the social environment.

(World Health Organization, Commission on the Social Determinants of Health, March 2005)

"Health is much more than just the absence of disease or disability. It is a state of physical, emotional and social well-being. Our education, employment, income and physical environment influence our health as much or more than the quality and availability of health services ... The government of Alberta is concerned about the health disparity between low and high income Albertans."

(Alberta's 2004 Report on Comparable Health Indicators, Dec. 9, 2004, Alberta Health and Wellness)

**Determinants of Health:
What makes Canadians Healthy or Unhealthy?**

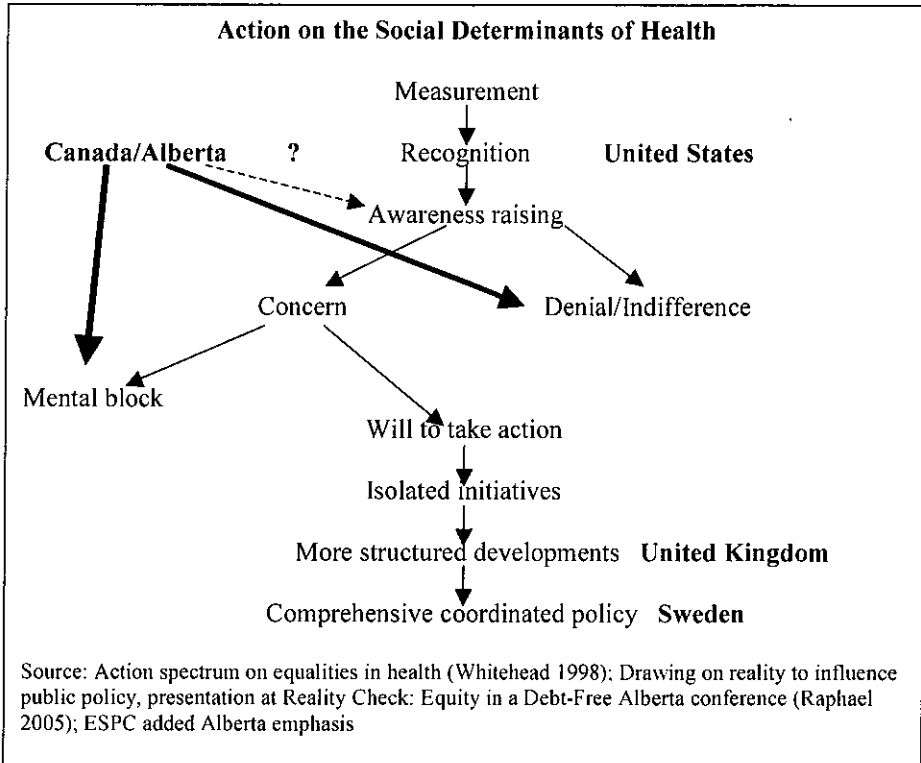
1. Income and Social Status
2. Social Support Networks
3. Education and Literacy
4. Employment/ Working Conditions
5. Social Environments
6. Physical Environments
7. Personal Health Practices and Coping Skills
8. Healthy Child Development
9. Biology and Genetic Endowment
10. Health Services
11. Gender
12. Culture

Source: Health Canada, Public Health Agency of Canada

The challenge: "Create social conditions which ensure good health for the entire population"

(Sweden's National Health Strategy, National Institute of Public Health, 2003)

Canada played a leading role in developing the concepts of health promotion, population health and the social determinants. But compared to the UK and Sweden, Canada has fallen behind in adopting policies that effectively address the primary social and economic determinants—poverty and inequity.



Alberta has much to learn from the approaches of other countries in improving health by addressing the social determinants of health. In the late 1990s, Sweden launched a new and innovative public health strategy based on a social determinants model. The overall aim of the strategy is to "create social conditions which ensure good health for the entire population." (National Institute of Public Health, Sweden, 2003)

For more see our discussion paper: *Creating Social and Health Equity: Adopting an Alberta Social Determinants of Health Framework*. Available on our website or by calling our office.

Recognizing the social determinants of health as an important influence on health, and then allocating resources proportional to their influence, would be **ground-breaking health care reform** in Canada.

The Edmonton Social Planning Council envisions the adoption of an Alberta Social Determinants of Health Framework that will improve the health of individuals and all Albertans. The adoption of this framework would represent an important shift in emphasis from an illness based health care system to a wellness-based system that focuses on preventing illness and chronic disease by addressing the social determinants of health.