

## **A WORKING GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

### **Prepared by Prevention Institute**

#### **Actual Causes of Death**

The “Actual Causes of Death” were identified by researchers McGinnis and Foege to determine the true underlying causes of death in the United States. In most cases, cause of death is attributable to a medical condition or event, i.e. lung cancer, for example. The *actual* cause of death, however, in many of these cases is tobacco.

#### **Advocacy**

The act of arguing in favor of, or advancing, something, such as a cause, an idea or a policy, using multiple means, including, but not limited to, press conferences, briefing papers, legislative testimony, and demonstrations.

#### **Behavioral Factors**

Those factors that are characterized by, or attributed to, how individuals behave.

#### **Built Environment**

Refers to the manmade surroundings that provide the setting for human activity, from the largest-scale civic surroundings to the smallest personal place.

#### **Community Empowerment**

The ability of people who live in a community to gain understanding and control over their personal, social, economic and political forces and to take action to improve their life situation.

#### **Community Factors**

Those factors that are characterized by, or attributed to, a place or larger grouping of people. Within the health disparities framework, the community factors refer to a specific set of elements within a community that hold the most potential for affecting health outcomes. These community factors include, but are not limited to, social networks & trust, housing, what is sold & how it is promoted, jobs & local ownership, and parks & open space.

#### **Community Health**

The state of wellness or well-being in a defined community; affected by forces in addition to health care services, including adequate housing, quality of schools, safe streets, economic stability, and the environment.

#### **Community Health Improvement**

The betterment of the health status of a community, especially deriving from those activities that focus on the prevention of illness and disability, and the creation of conditions that promote the well-being of community residents.

## **Disparity**

Difference or inequality. Health Disparities refers to specific populations and communities experiencing unequal (higher) rates of the same diseases affecting the country as a whole.

## **Environment**

Far more than air, water, and soil, the environment is anything external to individuals shared by members of the community, including community behavioral norms. According to the American Heritage Dictionary, it is the totality of circumstances surrounding an organism or group of organisms.

## **Environmental Change**

Refers to changes in both the social, cultural, and political environment, as well as the physical environment, at the community level; a change in organizational practice or policy.

## **Environmental Justice**

Equal access to healthy environments. It is a term that arises from documented environmental injustice as a result of race and class. Instances of environmental injustice includes low-income communities and communities of color being disproportionately targeted for facilities that have negative health impacts and also includes the lack of clean-up of known but unintentional toxins, and lack of adequate emergency preparedness and response in those same communities.

## **Equity**

Equity in health is the absence of systematic disparities in health (or in the major social determinants of health) between groups with different levels of underlying social advantage/disadvantage—that is, wealth, power, or prestige. Equity is an ethical principle; it also is consonant with and closely related to human rights principles. [See also Inequity]

## **Healthy People 2010**

A statement of national health objectives by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services designed to identify the most significant preventable threats to health and to establish national goals to reduce these threats.

[www.healthypeople.gov](http://www.healthypeople.gov)

## **Inequity**

Inequity in health refers to systematic disparities in health (or in the major social determinants of health) between groups with different levels of underlying social advantage/disadvantage—that is, wealth, power, or prestige. Inequities in health systematically put groups of people who are already socially disadvantaged (for example, by virtue of being poor, female, and/or members of a disenfranchised racial, ethnic, or religious group) at further disadvantage with respect to their health.

### **Inter-disciplinary**

Of, relating to, or involving two or more academic or professional disciplines that are usually considered distinct.

### **Norms**

Regularities in behavior with which people generally conform. Often based in culture and tradition, they are attitudes, beliefs and standards that are taken for granted. Norms are behavior shapers.

### **Oppression**

The negative outcome experienced by people targeted by the arbitrary and cruel exercise of power in a society or social group. The term itself derives from the idea of being "weighted down."

The term oppression is primarily used to describe how a certain group is being *kept down* by unjust use of force, authority, or societal norms. When this is institutionalized formally or informally in a society, it is referred to as "systematic oppression". Oppression is most commonly felt and expressed by a widespread, if unconscious, assumption that a certain group of people are inferior.

### **Organizational Practices**

Refers to how organizations conduct their work on an on-going basis. These could be practices that arose out of the organizational culture or that are governed by company policy or regulation.

### **Pathway**

The sequence of outcomes or events that occur in order to reach your long-term goal. Most initiatives have multiple pathways which lead to the long-term goal. The health disparities trajectory describes a pathway through which root factors interplay with behavioral and environmental factors and medical conditions to result in health disparities.

### **Place-based**

That which is location-specific, be it neighborhood, city, or region.

### **Policy**

A code or set of regulations governing actions or procedures; generally can be found in statutes (laws) and regulations, and may be reflected in budgets, mission statements and organizational cultures. Generally policy can refer to officially agreed upon regulations voted for by cities, counties, etc., but they may also be developed by other legal entities such as corporate boards of directors. Organizational practices and other less formally set decisions are sometimes referred to as policies as well, although this is technically inaccurate.

## **Policy Change**

A shift in the formal operations of organizations and/or governmental institutions that allows new or different activities to occur and thrive. These shifts may arise from information-sharing, community participation, professional input, compromise, and consensus-building and are usually the result of effective advocacy.

## **Primary Prevention**

Taking action *before* a problem arises rather than treating or alleviating its consequences.

## **Priority Medical Issues**

*The California Campaign to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health* identified nine Priority Medical Issues which cause significant morbidity and/or mortality among people of color and are associated with the achievable objectives outlined in *Healthy People 2010*. They are: 1) cardiovascular disease, 2) breast cancer, 3) cervical cancer, 4) diabetes, 5) HIV/AIDS, 6) infant mortality, 7) asthma, 8) mental health, and 9) trauma (including intentional and unintentional injury).

## **Resilience**

Often refers to the ability of a person or community to positively adapt and develop in the face of new or different experiences and environments. Fostering resiliency in people has been shown to improve academic, emotional, social, and cognitive outcomes. Further, building community resilience factors or assets can counteract the negative effects of risk factors. Research shows that, like risk, resiliency factors can accumulate such that those with more assets are less likely to engage in high-risk behaviors.

## **Risk**

In an endangered state, especially from lack of proper care; the possibility of suffering a harmful event; a factor or course involving uncertain danger, as with smoking

## **Risk Factor**

Something that may increase the likelihood of a person becoming sick, injured or harmed in any way. Risk factors can be caused or exacerbated by individual behavior (i.e. smoking) and by the environments in which we live (lack of safety in the neighborhood).

## **Root Factors**

Underlying issues and dynamics in society that contribute to inequality and ultimately lead to disparities in health, as well as other detrimental outcomes.

## **Social Capital**

The connections among individual-social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them, as well as standards for behavior that are socially dictated.

## **Social Determinants of Health**

The social determinants of health encompass the multitude of social conditions in which we live that have an impact on health. Three broad categories of social determinants are social institutions - including cultural and religious institutions, economic systems, and political structures; surroundings - including neighborhoods, workplaces, towns, cities, and built environments; and social relationships - including position in social hierarchy, differential treatment of social groups, and social networks. These can potentially be altered by social and health policies and programs.

## **Strategy**

A thoughtful, planned, general method undertaken to achieve an outcome; the way to get things done effectively. A strategy often describes a variety of activities, who will do them and how they will work together, and also typically includes a timeline or sequence of these efforts.

## **Systems Change**

A permanent change to the policies, practices, and decisions of related organizations or institutions in the public and/or private sector.

## **Sustainability**

Ensuring that an effort or change lasts. Note: sustainability is often misunderstood as securing further or ongoing funding for a program that otherwise would end. It is important to understand that sustainability can be achieved without ongoing funding by changing policies, norms, attitudes, etc.

## **Trajectory**

A route or direction. In relation to health disparities, a trajectory illustrates the route from which root factors such as racism, oppression and inequality negatively influence the broader environment and individual behavior and lead to illness and injury, and ultimately result in disparities in health.