Understanding the Social Determinants of Health

Description:

This tool provides an overview of the social determinants of health, both from a mainstream and an Indigenous perspective, and a checklist.

How it can be used:

The determinants of health are the economic and social conditions which help determine the health of people. They include:

- the social and economic environment;
- the physical environment;
- the individual characteristics and behaviours.

For your community, assess the following determinants of health that can have a direct impact on physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental health. When you have finished your assessment, identify those that are 'somewhat of an issue' and 'a serious issue'. These will be the priority areas for community planning and can be used by health managers and community leaders to assess which areas of their community are strong or which require extra attention.

Being healthy isn't only about making healthy lifestyle choices or having an effective health care system, although both are vitally important. The health of each community member is based more on a variety of determinants such as:
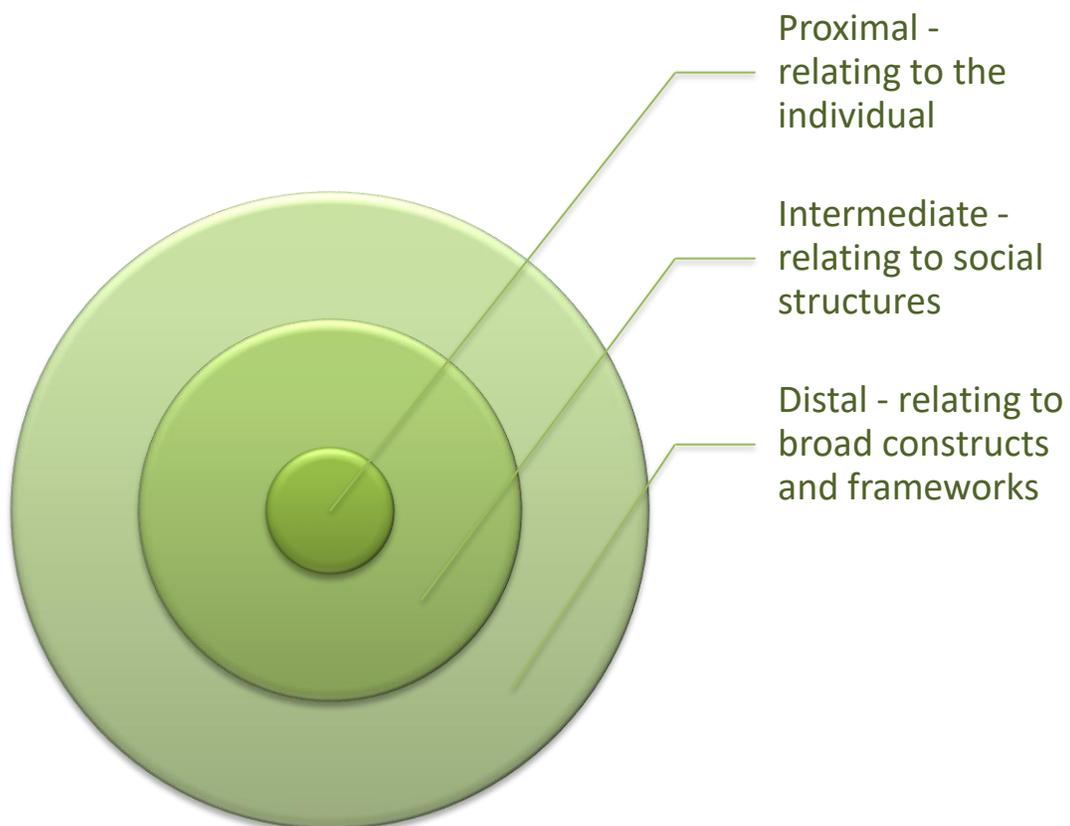
- health behaviours
- education level
- employment and job security
- housing
- food security
- disability
- early life experiences
- access to health services
- social networks
- gender
- race/culture
- income level

The National Collaborating Centre on Aboriginal Health presented the determinants of health through an Indigenous lens, using three categories.

1. Distal – those factors representing broad societal or historical constructs, frameworks, or experiences. For example, colonization, racism, social inclusion or exclusion, self-determination.

2. Intermediate – those factors representing social structures such as health systems, education systems, community and social infrastructures, and environmental stewardship.

3. Proximal – those factors that represent an individual's behaviours, decisions, and environment. Examples would be health behaviours such as smoking, employment, education, social networks, and the physical environment.

Proximal - relating to the individual

Intermediate - relating to social structures

Distal - relating to broad constructs and frameworks

	Not an issue in our community	Somewhat of an issue in our community	A serious issue in our community
Health Behaviours			
Abuse of alcohol			
Abuse of drugs			
Excessive smoking			
Adequate pre-natal care			
Access to adequate exercise facilities			
Physical Environments			
Sufficient housing (enough for the community)			
Good quality housing (or are there significant issues such as mould?)			
Access to safe water in homes			
Sanitation and waste management are sufficient			
Employment and Income			
Access to meaningful employment			
The majority of employable community members are employed			
Average incomes are close to regional norms			
Education			
Students are completing high school			
Community members are pursuing post-secondary education			
Food Security			
Community has access to affordable healthy foods			
Community members source traditional foods through hunting/fishing/trapping			
Health System			
Sufficient access to health services (e.g., physician, nurses, dental, mental health, physical therapist)			
Reasonable access to acute care facility			
Community Infrastructure			
Community programs are available and provide sufficient opportunities for growth			
Community members have access to community programs			
Economic development is a community priority			
Environment			
Community has ties to the land			
Environmental contamination is close to our community (e.g., mercury in water, etc.)			

	Not an issue in our community	Somewhat of an issue in our community	A serious issue in our community
Cultural Continuity			
Social cohesion in our community			
Community maintains cultural practices			
Community practices self-determination in health, social, education, security, cultural facilities, etc.			
Elders are engaged in the community			
Intergenerational connectedness			
Traditional native language is spoken			
Residential school effects are being addressed			