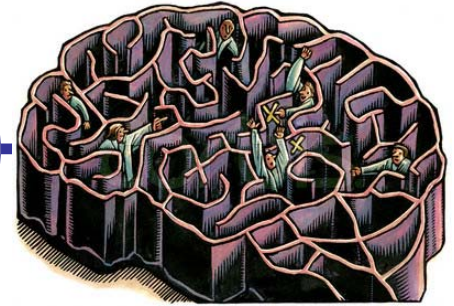


COMMUNIQUE



SPC-CND RESEARCH PARADIGMS

selection of research we undertake, how the research is approached and carried out, the 'lens' from which we interpret findings, and the means for implementing and disseminating results.

These paradigms are:

1) the healthy communities concept; **2)** the social determinants of health, and **3)** participatory action research.

The following paragraphs briefly outline the primary components of each framework.

The Healthy Communities Concept

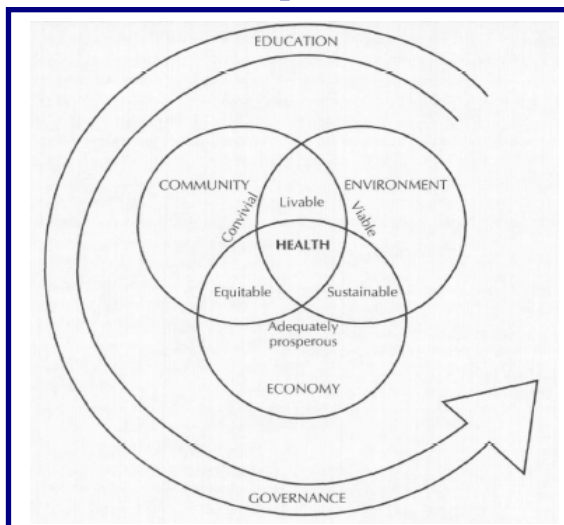


Diagram of the healthy community concept showing basic framework for indicators

The healthy communities concept is modeled on basic indicators identified by Hancock, Labonte and Edward (1999) in a published work of their research entitled "Indicators that Count!"¹ as well as prerequisites for health promotion outlined in the *Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion*

(1986).² In the model for a healthy community, value is given to balancing the interrelationships between facets of our life that bear on health—mainly social, economic and environmental. Human health is viewed as a "state of complete physical, mental and social well-

being."³ [see figure]⁴ A holistic understanding therefore is needed which examines people not only as individuals, but situated within the communities in which they live. It is also important for people to be in control of processes and decisions that affect their well-being. Furthermore, communities have an inherent right to determine their own issues, priorities and action plans when it comes to human health. A healthy community is one that values healthy processes as well as healthy outcomes. This vision includes a process of broad-based commitment from local government, citizens and institutional representation.

The Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition, which advocates

The SPC conducts research and policy analysis utilizing three main frameworks that guide the

for Healthy Communities in this province, describes a Healthy Community as one that provides:

- a clean and safe physical environment,
- peace, equity and social justice,
- adequate access to food, water, shelter, income, safety, work & recreation for all,
- adequate access to health care services,
- opportunities for learning and skill development,
- strong, mutually supportive relationships and networks,
- workplaces that are supportive of individual and family well-being,
- wide participation of residents in decision-making,
- strong local cultural and spiritual heritage,
- a diverse and vital economy,
- protection of the natural environment, and
- responsible use of resources to ensure long term sustainability.⁵

Social determinants of health

Social conditions are major determinants of health. There is an extensive body of evidence that supports the concept that socioeconomic position has at least as much—and often more—influence on health status as personal health behaviours and medical

(SDOH). SDOH is understood as the following:

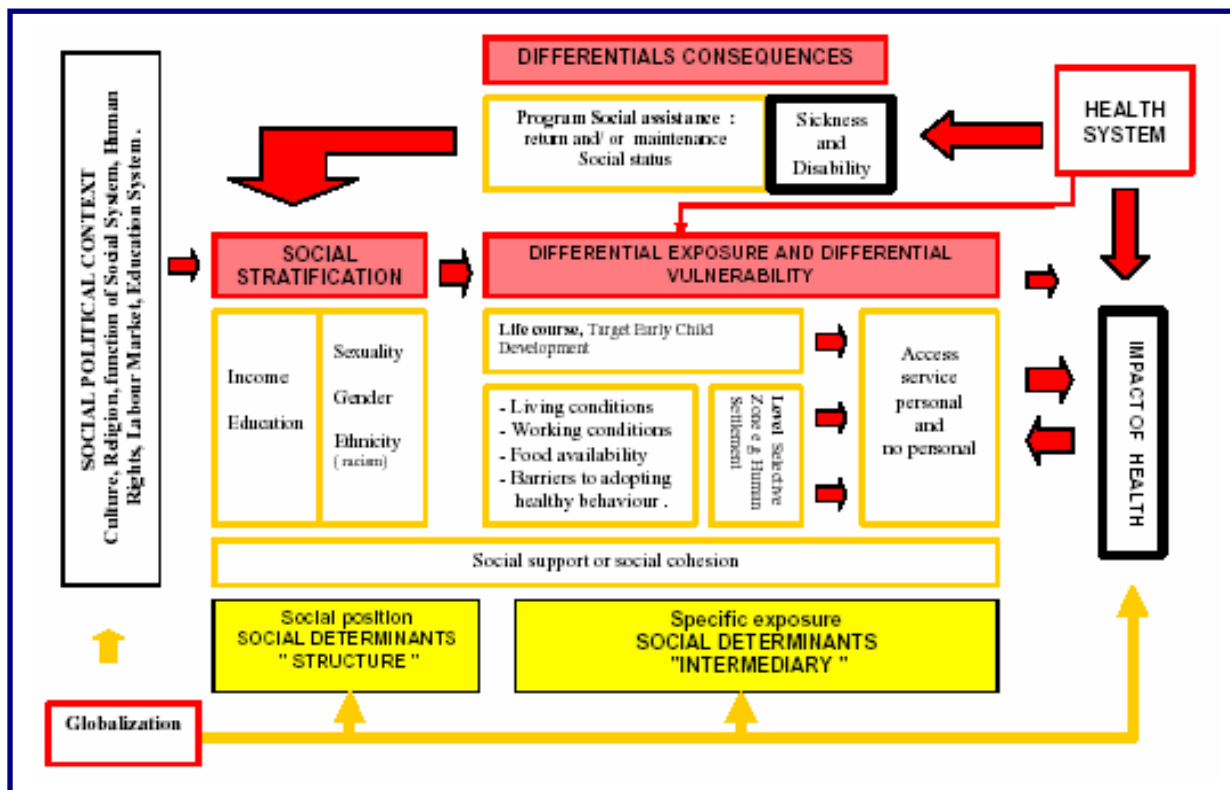
Social determinants of health are the economic and social conditions that influence the health of individuals, communities and jurisdictions as a whole. Social determinants of health determine whether individuals stay healthy or become ill (a

*variety of resources that a society makes available to its members.*⁸ (p. 1) [see figure]⁹

The World Health Organization has identified some of the most important SDOH as:

- poverty,
- economic inequality,
- social status,
- stress,

foundation' intended to guide policy choices and decisions. Health equity is the "absence of unfair and avoidable or remediable differences in health among population groups defined socially, economically, demographically or geographically."¹¹ (p.6) Because health inequities have their roots in social stratification, health equity is interrelated with



care.⁶ For example, in a 2002 study of the state of the health care system in Canada, at least 75% of the health of Canadians could not be attributed to illness, disease or other medical factors, but rather physical, social, and economic influences.⁷ These influences have been termed 'social determinants of health'

World Health Organization Equity Team social determinants framework

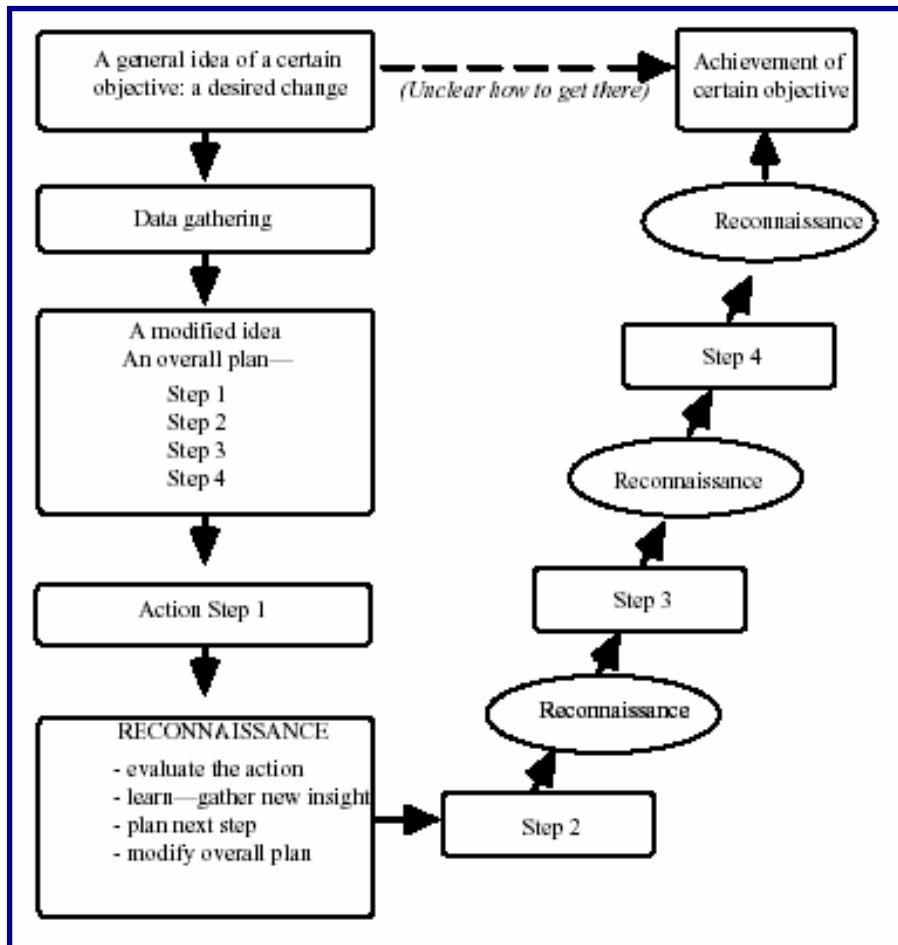
narrow definition of health). Social determinants of health also determine the extent to which a person possesses the physical, social and personal resources to identify and achieve personal aspirations, satisfy needs and cope with the environment (a broader definition of health). Social determinants of health are about the quantity and quality of

- education and care in early life,
- social exclusion,
- employment and job security,
- social support, and
- food security.¹⁰

A core value of the SDOH concept is 'health equity', which has been adopted by WHO as an 'ethical

"political realities" and the "negotiation of social power relations." Ultimately, the pursuit of health equity and social justice are intertwined because of the strong connection between the action of governing institutions and social conditions.¹²

Participatory action research



The action research process

Participatory action is primarily a methodological approach to conducting research. As a type of 'action research', participatory action research (PAR) closely links findings and action—theory and practice—and used by people who want to apply research to a specific context with the goal of intervening or having an impact on a situation.

There are a wide array of participatory approaches to research from activist participa-

tory research to rapid rural appraisal and applied anthropology. Countless definitions for PAR exist, and can vary depending on the approach, but broadly participatory action research refers to:

*a "systematic inquiry, with the collaboration of those affected by the issue being studied, for the purposes of education, taking action or effecting social change."*¹³ It has been described as a "collective knowledge seeking and knowledge creating process" and as the "new frontier of fruitful research."¹⁴

The overall goals of PAR are encapsulated in the notion that learning is a process for mutual exchange. The distinction between researchers ('etic') and those being researched ('emic') is broken down (i.e. the subjects and objects of knowledge production) by the participation of people in creating and gaining knowledge for and about themselves. "Research is seen not only as a process of creating knowledge,

but simultaneously, as education and development of consciousness, and of mobilization for action."¹⁵ (p.19) [see figure]¹⁶

A number of guiding principles characterize participatory research. These represent key principles widely accepted in the field that can be used by researchers to evaluate their proposals or projects using the following criteria:

- The "problem" originates within the community or workplace itself.
- The research goal is to improve fundamentally the lives of those involved, through structural transformation.
- The people of the community or workplace are involved in controlling the entire research process.
- The focus of participatory action research is on oppressed groups affected by inaccessibility, colonization, marginalization, exploitation, racism, sex-ism, cultural disaffection, and so forth.
- Participatory research helps to enable action by strengthening people's awareness of their own capabilities.
- The people themselves are researchers, as are those who have specialized research training.
- Researchers with specialized training might be outsiders to the community, but are committed learners in a process that leads to change rather than detachment.¹⁷

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⁷Kirby, M. (2002). The health of Canadians-The federal role (Volume six: Recommendations for Reform). Final report on the state of the health care system in Canada. Ottawa, ON: The Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology.

See the following website: <<http://www.parl.gc.ca/37/2/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/soci-e/rep-e/repoct02vol6-e.htm>>.

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The SPC promotes the "democratization of data" to build a healthy community with active citizens involved in multi-sector networks and accessible organizations that work together.

The role of the SPC is to collect, analyze and openly share data on: community trends; demographics (current and projections); and best practices (local and beyond).

The Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries is located in downtown Cambridge. Our office hours are Monday to Friday, 9:00 am to 4:00 pm.

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