



National Collaborating Centre  
for Determinants of Health

Centre de collaboration nationale  
des déterminants de la santé

# SOCIAL DETERMINANTS, HEALTH EQUITY AND MENTAL HEALTH: A CURATED LIST

In Canada, public health practitioners at all levels recognize that mental health and the social determinants of health are interconnected. Positive mental health supports employment, healthy relationships, educational achievement and the management of daily life. Conversely, poor mental health is associated with socioeconomic inequities such as poverty, unsafe housing and food insecurity.<sup>1</sup>

The National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health (NCCDH) has compiled a list of resources to support public health action on the social determinants of mental health equity. The search for and choice of resources was guided by how action on socioeconomic circumstances also impacts population mental health outcomes. This curated list highlights 17 relevant resources and points to other key documents; it is not intended to be comprehensive or exhaustive.

The list organizes resources into four categories: **evidence and concepts, actions in the Canadian context, practice and policy**, and **mental health inequities experienced by specific population groups**.

## EVIDENCE AND CONCEPTS

Literature that links the social determinants of health and mental health outcomes can help us support public health practice to address mental health inequities.



### Poverty and mental health

*Elliott I. [2016].*

This 2016 report informs an anti-poverty strategy for the United Kingdom. It describes a review of synthesized evidence from a broad collection of public policy agendas, exploring

the relationship between poverty, mental health and mental illness. The document presents a framework that links mental health with socioeconomic determinants, life course, human rights, criminal justice, racialization and community movement–building. The author makes recommendations to address data, research, policy, cross-sectoral collaboration and interventions across the life course.

<sup>1</sup> Shim et al., 2014.



### Mental health, resilience and inequalities

Friedli L. [2009].

This 2009 report explores the interaction between socioeconomic status and mental wellness, presenting mental health as being socially produced and thereby needing societal-

level strategies. Well-cited by subsequent mental health research, the report describes key influences on mental health, including values, culture, economic policy, resilience and the equity gap between income levels. The focus of this report encourages public health to think beyond individual circumstances and consider mental health as defined by relative levels of socioeconomic deprivation. The author describes pathways of influence that link mental health to inequities and encourage strategies that attend to poverty and relative deprivation as the way to improve mental health. In addition, the report explores implications for key policy areas and practical actions that demonstrate commitment to public mental health.



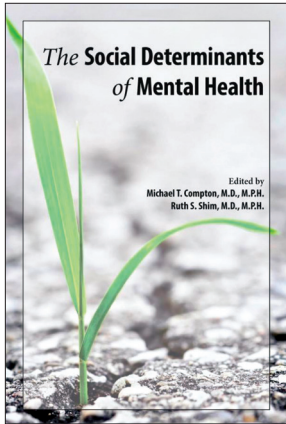
### Social determinants of mental health

World Health Organization, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. [2014].

As part of a 2014 series of four thematic papers co-produced by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Calouste Gulbenkian

Foundation, the goal of this report is twofold: first, to increase knowledge about the factors that shape individual and collective levels of mental health and well-being, and, second, to identify action to promote and protect good mental health. One of the publication's main findings is that mental health promotion and the prevention of mental illness is required to improve population health and reduce health inequities. The paper provides a framework for taking a life course approach to address the social determinants of mental health, requiring action at early child, youth, transition to adulthood, adult and older adult stages. The authors name proportionate universalism as an approach to support actions that include "a range of responses for different levels of disadvantage"<sup>2</sup> at local, community and broader levels of society. Links between mental health and income, family structure, community, housing and other social determinants are also explored, requiring strategies that promote mental health at a population level.

<sup>2</sup> NCCDH, 2013:3.



**The social determinants of mental health**

Compton MT, Shim RS, editors. [2015].

This 2015 book explores the social determinants of mental health from both a public health and clinical perspective. Individual chapters, written by

authors from diverse scholarly backgrounds, discuss the impact of socioeconomic conditions on mental health. This includes adverse life experiences, education, employment, discrimination, food insecurity, built environment, income and healthcare access. The book’s policy implications relate to population health and applications for public health and clinical practice. The authors frame action on the social determinants of health as a strategy to impact mental health outcomes at individual and population levels.

mental health. The authors highlight the previously neglected relationship between mental health and structural policies, such as power, income, employment, social environments and access to healthcare. Although somewhat focused on mental illness and disorders, this article describes the need to identify, understand and address the social and structural determinants of health and health equity. A main conclusion is that improving overall population mental health will require public health policy and action that creates environments to support positive mental health and mitigate the impact of mental illness.

**OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES**

- Lund C, Brooke-Sumner C, Baingana F, Baron EC, Breuer E, Chandra P, et al. Social determinants of mental disorders and the Sustainable Development Goals: a systematic review of reviews. *Lancet Psychiat*. 2018;5(4):357-69.
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health [Internet]. Toronto (ON): the Centre; no date. Health equity; no date [cited 2019 Sep 5];[about 10 screens]. Available from: [www.camh.ca/en/driving-change/healthequity](http://www.camh.ca/en/driving-change/healthequity)



**Social determinants of mental health: overview and call to action**

Shim R, Koplan C, Langheim FJP, Manseau MW, Powers RA, Compton MT. [2014].

This 2014 article serves as a call to action to increase awareness of the social determinants of mental health as a matter of social justice. Among its various arguments, it describes the intersection of socioeconomic factors, the development of mental illness and the maintenance of

Historically, many theories have been proposed to help explain the origins of disease. During the 19th century, miasma theory attributed the cause of disease to "bad air" and led to a focus on public health interventions to improve living conditions of populations as a means of effectively limiting the spread of disease. This theory, although later supplanted by the germ theory of disease, was one of the earliest conceptualizations regarding the role of social factors in causing and limiting disease. Furthermore, researchers have begun to explore public health interventions, such as urban sanitation

## ACTIONS IN THE CANADIAN CONTEXT

Canadian frameworks and strategies can help public health situate action on health equity to improve mental health outcomes in the context of national priorities.

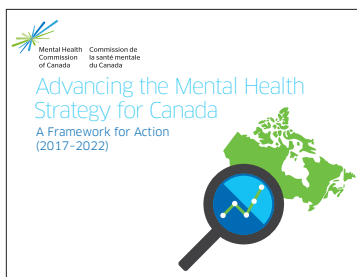


### [Cohesive, collaborative, collective: Advancing mental health promotion in Canada](#)

Canadian Mental Health Association. [2019].

This 2019 report outlines the findings of a large-scale evidence review on the

alignment of mental health promotion programming with action on the social determinants of health in Canada. This includes providing an in-depth description of a theoretical framework that addresses risk and protective factors. The framework establishes the social determinants of health as the root causes of mental health inequities and offers a comprehensive list of recommendations for policy action at multiple levels. Recommendations include the consideration of the mental health implications on all policies, measuring the economic impact of mental health promotion programs, developing cross-sectoral partnerships that address power and other structural inequities, and reducing the stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness.

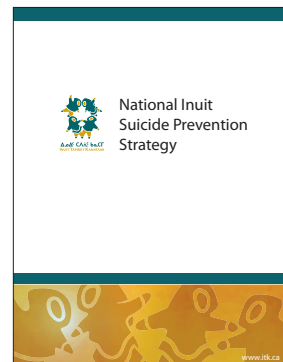


### [Advancing the mental health strategy for Canada: A framework for action \(2017-2022\)](#)

Mental Health Commission of Canada. [2016].

The strategic framework described in this document identifies four pillars for action by the Mental Health Commission of Canada: leadership and funding, promotion and prevention, access and services, and data and research.

The authors provide key considerations for each area, along with potential roles and actions to guide public health in Canada. Particular attention is given to Indigenous mental health and reconciliation, the engagement of people with lived experience of mental health inequities, the importance of inclusion and diversity, and professional training. Suggested actions include policy research, advocacy, knowledge translation, access to healthcare, research, intersectoral collaboration and data reporting. Prevention and promotion activities include actions related to the social determinants of health, such as housing, early child development and services that are both safe and culturally competent.



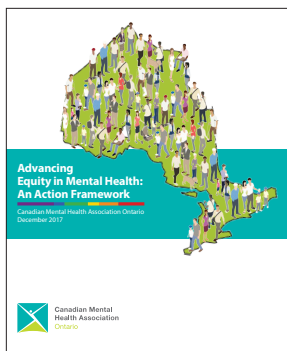
### [National Inuit suicide prevention strategy](#)

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. [2016].

Also available in Inuktitut, Roman Orthography, Nunavik and Nunatsiavut.

This 2016 strategy describes a collective, Inuit-specific approach for suicide

prevention based on social and economic inequities affecting Inuit communities. It includes six priority areas for action: social equity, cultural continuity, early Inuit child health, Inuit mental health services, trauma and grief healing, and the mobilization of Inuit knowledge. The document presents evidence that links suicide risk with historical trauma, social inequities, adverse childhood experiences and mental distress. In addition, the authors provide a framework of social determinants of Inuit health and protective factors that reduce suicide risk for Inuit, pointing to areas of action across sectors.



### Advancing equity in mental health: An action framework

Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario. [2017].

This 2017 report offers a comprehensive action framework that explores how the experience of inequities

intersects with mental health and addictions. The authors suggest strategies for public health practitioners and service providers to address mental health inequities at three levels of the health system: service delivery, organization, and regional planning and provincial policy. In addition, the report identifies key areas for action on health equity to influence mental health outcomes. These include embedding equity in policy and planning, growing the evidence base for the link between equity and mental health, addressing social determinants of health through community-building, engaging people with lived experience of mental health inequities and addressing stigma and discrimination experienced by those with mental illness.

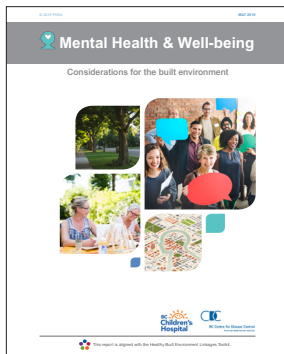
The action framework was informed by a 2014 document titled *Advancing equity in Ontario: Understanding key concepts*. This accompanying discussion paper describes the relationship between equity and mental health, including a focus on people with lived experience of mental illness; communities who live in marginalized circumstances related to the social determinants of health; and groups who experience discrimination based on sexuality, race, poverty or disability. The framework outlines roles for those working in health service provision (including mental health) and in social policy at individual, community and health system levels.

### OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES

- Anderson T. The social determinants of higher mental distress among Inuit [Internet]. Ottawa (ON): Statistics Canada; 2015 [cited 2019 Sep 5]. 20 p. Available from: [www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/89-653-x/89-653-x2015007-eng.pdf?st=3V6-Hvgf](http://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/89-653-x/89-653-x2015007-eng.pdf?st=3V6-Hvgf)
- The Atlantic Summer Institute on Healthy and Safe Communities [Internet]. Charlottetown (PEI): ASI; c2018. ASI call to action to promote child and youth mental health; no date [cited 2019 Sep 5];[about 22 screens]. Available from: [www.asi-iea.ca/en/call-to-action](http://www.asi-iea.ca/en/call-to-action)
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- Roberts G, Grimes K. Return on investment: mental health promotion and mental illness prevention [Internet]. London (ON): Canadian Policy Network at the University of Western Ontario; 2011 [cited 2019 Sep 5]. 76 p. Available from: [https://cpa.ca/docs/File/Practice/roi\\_mental\\_health\\_report\\_en.pdf](https://cpa.ca/docs/File/Practice/roi_mental_health_report_en.pdf)

## PRACTICE AND POLICY

Practice-informed tools and policies help support the planning and development of interventions for action on positive mental health promotion through action on health equity.



### [Mental health and wellbeing: Considerations for the built environment](#)

*BC Children's Hospital.* [2019].

This 2019 document was developed as an addendum to the [Healthy Built Environment](#)

[Linkages Toolkit](#) to draw attention to the intersection of mental health and built environments. This practical guide offers background information on the link between mental health and five features of the built environment: neighborhood design, transportation networks, natural environments, food systems and housing. Planning solutions across all five features provide considerations for public health practitioners working cross-sectorally to influence mental health outcomes of built environment initiatives.



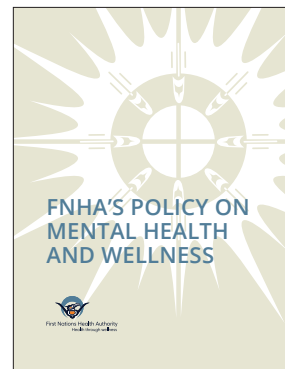
### [Public mental health action framework](#)

*Public Health Sudbury and Districts.* [2019].

This 2019 framework was developed in response to the 2018 [Ontario Public Health Standards](#) (OPHS), which clearly identify a mandate for

local public health to focus on mental health promotion and mental illness prevention, early identification and referral. The report uses the term *public mental health* to situate social determinants of mental health as being the same as the social determinants of physical health. Moreover, the authors present issues of social inclusion, freedom from discrimination and violence, and access to economic resources as important determinants of mental health.

The framework encourages prioritizing the engagement of people with lived experience of mental health inequities to inform mental health promotion, mental illness prevention, early identification and referral as core elements of all public health programs. In addition, the authors promote public health interventions supported by population health assessment, effective public health practice, and addressing health inequities to address social determinants of health and health equity to impact population mental health.



### [FNHA's policy on mental health and wellness](#)

*First Nations Health Authority.* [2018].

This document outlines the First Nations Health Authority's policy-level commitment to mental health and wellness as a

core component of care for First Nations people in British Columbia, Canada. The policy outlines a vision for First Nations self-determined approaches to promote mental health and wellness in all aspects of people's lives. Based on cultural and traditional wellness and health equity lenses, the core components of mental health promotion explored here include a system-level focus on health and wellness literacy, community capacity-building and education. The resource also unpacks five key areas of action: (1) addressing the root causes of poor mental health, (2) culture and traditional healing practices, (3) equitable access to programs and services, (4) an integrative mental health approach and (5) self-determination as a determinant of First Nations mental health. The systemic approach recommended in this document aligns with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.



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### [Collaborative NCCPH project on population mental health promotion](#)

*National Collaborating  
Centres for Public Health.*  
[No date, accessed 2019].

This website links to a collective project of the six National Collaborating Centres for Public Health (NCCPH) focusing on population mental health promotion. Resources on this website include materials from a 2018 national forum on public health roles in population mental health promotion, including presentations and materials distributed to explore the actions that can be taken by public health practitioners. The collection also features a series of documents focused on population mental health promotion for children and youth, including foundational concepts and relationship of positive mental health to social and physical environments, chronic and infectious disease, and policy considerations for Indigenous youth.



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### [Population mental health](#)

*National Collaborating Centre  
for Healthy Public Policy.*  
[No date, accessed 2019].

This website links to numerous projects by the National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy (NCCHPP) related to population mental health promotion. The NCCHPP has worked in the area of population mental health since 2014 and has produced a number of valuable resources for public health professionals. Their work in this area includes contributing to the knowledge base, identifying mental health strategies in Canada and defining roles for public health to take action on positive mental health promotion. Two of the NCCHPP's key publications on this topic are *[A framework for supporting action in population mental health](#)* and *[Population mental health in Canada: Summary of emerging needs and orientations to support the public health workforce](#)*. These exist in addition to other documents and presentations on policy and collaborative public health interventions in this area.

### [OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES](#)

- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Toronto Public Health, Dalla Lana School of Public Health [Internet]. Toronto (ON): Evidence Exchange Network; 2019. Best practice guidelines for mental health promotion programs; 2019 Jan 2 [cited 2019 Sep 5];[about 5 screens]. Available from: <https://eenet.ca/resource/best-practice-guidelines-mental-health-promotion-programs>
- Roberge MC, Laforest J, Melançon A. Consultation sur l'organisation des services de santé mentale pour les jeunes : propositions de santé publique. [Internet]. Québec (QC): Institut national de santé publique du Québec; 2019 [cited 2019 Sep 5]. 34 p. Available from: [www.inspq.qc.ca/sites/default/files/publications/2562\\_organisation\\_services\\_sante\\_mentale\\_jeunes.pdf](http://www.inspq.qc.ca/sites/default/files/publications/2562_organisation_services_sante_mentale_jeunes.pdf)

## MENTAL HEALTH INEQUITIES EXPERIENCED BY SPECIFIC POPULATION GROUPS

By understanding which population groups are more likely to experience mental health inequities, we can support public health action on particular health promoting circumstances for these communities.



[Taking action on health equity and diversity: Responding to the mental health needs of children, youth and families new to Canada](#)

*Stol J, Khanlou N, Nguyen H, Tran V, Omer S, Yip A, et al. [2015].*

This 2015 policy paper can inform policy- and decision-makers about the mental health needs of newcomers to Canada, barriers to addressing these needs and models that provide options to meet these needs. It presents research evidence along with the experiences of those who provide and use services. The resource introduces core concepts such as how mental health is rooted in social inequities, diversity, culture, identity and access to services. This paper also outlines the mental health needs of newcomer families related to the social determinants of health, including risk and protective factors at the individual, family and community levels. Recommendations point to interventions related to service delivery, addressing barriers to care, mental health promotion and strengths-based approaches, as well as engagement of newcomer families to develop initiatives that address social determinants of mental health.



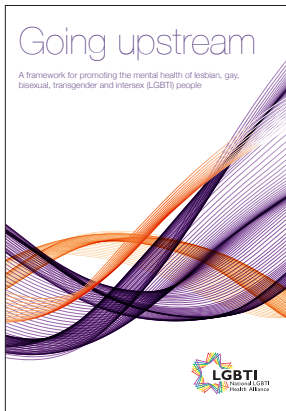
AMERICAN  
PSYCHIATRIC  
ASSOCIATION

[Mental health disparities: Diverse populations](#)

*American Psychiatric Association.*

[No date, accessed 2019].

This website offers a collection of resources that highlight the connection between social determinants of health and mental health among specific population groups who experience inequities. It hosts a series of fact sheets emphasizing the intersection between mental health and inequities experienced by racialized groups, African Americans, Indigenous groups, LGBTQ communities, non-Christian religious groups and women. The fact sheets are concise summaries of available data, the disparities they illustrate and the implications for services. While the data in these resources is U.S.-based, the concepts and practice implications are transferrable to the Canadian context. Topics include the disproportionately high rates of poor mental health related to adverse living conditions, intergenerational trauma, barriers to accessing treatment, stigma and discrimination.

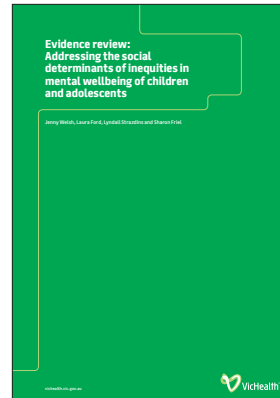


**Going upstream:  
A framework for promoting  
the mental health of lesbian,  
gay, bisexual, transgender  
and intersex (LGBTI) people**

*Leonard W, Metcalf A. [2014].*

This framework supports the development and delivery of programs to promote mental health among lesbian, gay,

bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people through action on the social determinants of mental health of LGBTI communities. Based on core principles of dignity, diversity, promotion, equity, participation and partnership, the framework outlines the benefits of mental health promotion at individual, family, organizational and societal levels. It is situated around key socioeconomic determinants of mental health for LGBTI groups, such as: social connection, access to social and economic resources, freedom from violence and discrimination and health promoting behaviours for physical and mental well-being. The resource also outlines interventions, target populations and settings to address mental health promotion for each determinant.



**Evidence review:  
Addressing the social  
determinants of inequities  
in mental wellbeing of  
children and adolescents**

*Welsh J, Ford L, Strazdins L,  
Friel S. [2015].*

This 2015 literature review summarizes evidence on

mental health inequities experienced by children and youth with a focus on socioeconomic determinants. Based on the VicHealth framework for health equity in mental well-being and mental illness, this document describes the influence of social position on individual health and daily living conditions, as well as exploring the relationship of societal context to mental health outcomes. The report also includes evidence and interventions to address social determinants of mental health inequities in a variety of settings: home, community, school, work, online, physical and social environments, and socio-political contexts. The review concludes that the majority of interventions currently in place are designed to prevent mental illness rather than promote mental health. The authors offer recommendations for planning at each level of the framework.

#### OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES

- Canadian Paediatric Society [Internet]. Ottawa (ON): CPS; 2019. Mental health promotion: mental health & development: caring for kids new to Canada; 2019 Apr [cited 2019 Sep 5];[about 15 screens]. Available from: [www.kidsnewtocanada.ca/mental-health/mental-health-promotion](http://www.kidsnewtocanada.ca/mental-health/mental-health-promotion)
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- Yee S, Breslin ML, Goode TD, Havercamp SM, Horner-Johnson W, Iezzoni LI, et al. Compounded disparities: health equity at the intersection of disability, race, and ethnicity [Internet]. Washington (DC): The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine; 2016 [cited 2019 Sep 5]. 177 p. Available from: <http://nationalacademies.org/hmd/~media/Files/Activity%20Files/SelectPops/HealthDisparities/Commissioned%20Papers%20and%20Perspectives/Compounded%20Disparities%20-%20Intersection%20of%20Disabilities%20Race%20and%20Ethnicity.pdf>

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