



National Collaborating Centre
for Determinants of Health

Centre de collaboration nationale
des déterminants de la santé

THE DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH: A CURATED LIST

What influences health? What factors are at the root of systemic, unjust and avoidable differences in health? How do these factors interact? Within the Canadian public health community, these questions are often discussed under the banner of the *determinants of health* concept. The National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health (NCCDH) describes this concept as follows:

Determinants of health refer to the factors that influence the health of individuals, communities and populations. Determinants of health include individual characteristics (e.g., behaviours, biology, genetics, lifestyle) and social, economic and physical environments, in addition to health care. While it is often used synonymously with social determinants of health, the term determinants of health is a broader concept that is not specific to the social justice roots of health inequities. It is important to specify social determinants of health and/or structural determinants of health in order to draw attention to root causes and solutions in public health equity work.¹

To complement *Let's Talk: Determinants of health*, the NCCDH curated a list of 13 resources, including grey literature reports and peer-reviewed articles, that can support further exploration and action in public health policy and practice.

As with other NCCDH curated lists, these selections are not comprehensive. They are intended to support understanding and action on the interrelated structural, social and ecological factors that influence health. We anticipate that these resources will be particularly useful for early learners seeking to gain a broad understanding of how the factors that influence health have been conceptualized.

The selected resources are divided into four categories and organized chronologically (oldest to most recent):

1. Structural and social determinants of health
2. Ecological determinants of health
3. Political and economic determinants of health
4. Determinants of Indigenous Peoples' health

STRUCTURAL AND SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH



[A conceptual framework for action on the social determinants of health](#)

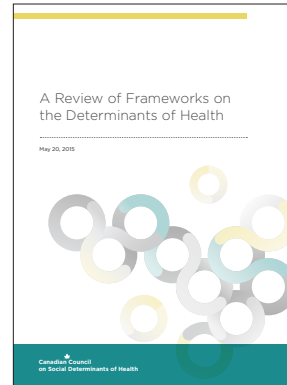
Solar O, Irwin A. [2010].

Written by Orielle Solar and Alec Irwin in 2010 to guide the World Health Organization's Commission on the Social Determinants

of Health, this 75-page paper reviews theories and models for understanding the social determinants of health.² It then proposes a single synthesized and graphically represented conceptual framework informed by theories of social power. The authors discuss the core components depicted within the framework and the policy actions needed to address the social determinants. They underscore the need to address context, engage in intersectoral action, and support social participation and power building.

Public health practitioners and students may be especially interested in how Solar and Irwin conceptualize:

- the *structural determinants and social determinants of health inequities* (p. 28),
- the direct and indirect ways that socioeconomic position influences exposure and vulnerability to health-compromising conditions (Figure 4 on p. 46), and
- various approaches to conceptualizing power (pp. 58–60).



[A review of frameworks on the determinants of health](#)

Canadian Council on the Social Determinants of Health. [2015].

The Canadian Council on the Social Determinants of Health commissioned a review of frameworks on

the determinants of health from Canada and globally. This report includes a compendium of 36 frameworks and takes a “closer look” at seven frameworks thought to be most useful for the Canadian context.³

Public health practitioners and students will find this resource particularly useful for:

- learning about the evolution of perspectives and understanding of the social determinants of health up until 2015;
- considering which determinants are cited within different frameworks; and
- understanding why different frameworks have been designed (e.g., to communicate the social determinants of health, to increase understanding of complex interactions between determinants of health, to support planning and policy action on the social determinants of health).



[Taking stock of the social determinants of health](#)

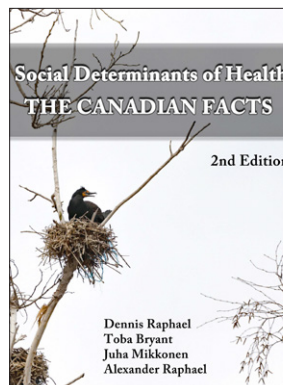
Lucy K, McLaren L. [2017].
[Disponible en français]

The authors of this scoping review were driven by a need to articulate what is meant by the social determinants of health given the increased

focus in this area.⁴ They reviewed academic and grey literature from population health, public health and health promotion, synthesizing 108 articles.

In their review, the authors note the social determinants of health were communicated as a list, model or story in the literature. They identify health equity as both an “overarching and binding concept” to the social determinants of health and a concept that is interpreted differently. Further, they report that health equity action is described as upstream structural approaches to address the distribution of resources in a population, and as downstream approaches that focus on behaviours or conditions for individuals and communities.

The Background section of this review will be of interest to those studying public health. It describes what is meant by *public and population health* and provides an overview of the evolution of the social determinants of health in the Canadian and United Kingdom contexts.



[Social determinants of health: The Canadian facts \(2nd ed.\)](#)

Raphael D, Bryant T, Mikkonen J, Raphael A. [2020]. [Disponible en français]

Written to promote action on the social determinants

of health and the underlying drivers of inequity, *The Canadian facts* is a well-known and often cited source for conceptualizing the social determinants of health.⁵ The authors analyze how unfair social and economic conditions drive differential exposure to various forms of stress and, ultimately, harm health. This resource names 17 social determinants of health. For each determinant, the authors reflect on its importance to health and discuss policy implications.

While *The Canadian facts* lists social determinants, the reflection in the accompanying text applies a structural lens that analyzes the political and economic context of each of the determinants. For example, when naming income, the authors discuss income distribution, income inequality and policies to increase minimum wage.

Public health students wishing to gain a broad understanding of the range of social and economic factors that influence health in the Canadian context will find this resource particularly useful.



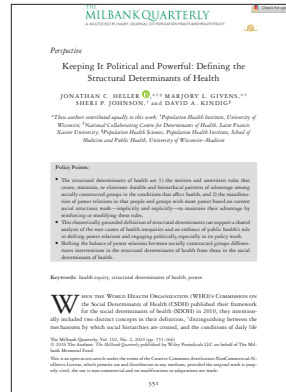
What would it take for health promotion to take structural racism seriously?

Ndumbe-Eyoh S. [2020].

This brief commentary strongly critiques the exclusion of structural racism from dominant discourse on health and

health influences.⁶ The author underscores that racial inequities must “stop being seen as random but as the natural product of oppressive racist norms, values and actions.”^[p4] She calls on health promotion to actively question why White supremacy is being upheld, become conscious of how structural racism functions (and is maintained), and respond to racism as it interacts with every aspect of daily life. The author concludes that health promotion must challenge race neutrality by (a) deepening understanding of how structural racism influences health and (b) developing anti-racist approaches to all health promotion activities.

Public health practitioners at all levels can integrate the commentary’s recommendations to disrupt structural racism within the discipline of health promotion, educational settings, research, policy and practice.



Keeping it political and powerful: Defining the structural determinants of health

Heller JC, Givens ML, Johnson SP, Kindig DA. [2024].

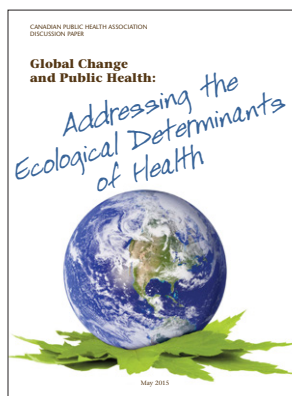
The authors of this paper propose a description of

the structural determinants of health based on a review of social and political theory.⁷ They argue that such a definition is needed given the depoliticization of the social determinants of health concept and the lack of public health action to redistribute power and resources in society. The authors share their hope that public health will engage politically to advance structural change and health equity. They conclude by encouraging public health to make small shifts in its current work to shift the balance of power, and recommend that public health advocate for policy change, influence world views and build coalitions.

This resource provides public health researchers and students with insights from relevant social and political theory (pp. 4–7). The wider public health community will be interested to review and discuss the description proposed for the structural determinants of health (p.7).

See also: *Let’s Talk: Redistributing power to advance health equity* (2023)⁸

ECOLOGICAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH



[Global change and public health: Addressing the ecological determinants of health](#)

Canadian Public Health Association. [2015].

[Disponible en français]

This discussion paper conceptualizes the ecological

determinants of health as “the ecosystem- based ‘goods and services’ that we get from nature ... oxygen, water, food, fuel, various natural resources, detoxifying processes, the ozone layer and a reasonably stable and habitable climate.”⁹[piv] The authors discuss these determinants, review ecological changes that harm the health of all living things (pp. 3–7), and importantly, call on readers to reckon with societal and human forces driving detrimental ecological change (pp. 7–10).

This resource provides public health students, practitioners and policy-makers with a broad understanding of how ecological determinants of health interact with other determinants. The authors call on members of the public health community to respond in various ways:

- expand public health principles to consider all forms of life,
- understand and address the ecological determinants of health,
- change social norms and values to address ecological crises, and
- work across sectors to create ecologically sustainable communities and societies.

See also: *[Towards an educational praxis for planetary health: A call for transformative, inclusive, and integrative approaches for learning and relearning in the Anthropocene](#)* (2023)¹⁰

ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH



The political determinants of health—10 years on

Kickbusch I. [2015].

The author of this brief commentary contends that applying a political determinants of health lens requires “analysing how different power

constellations, institutions, processes, interests, and ideological positions affect health within different political systems and cultures and at different levels of governance.”^{11(p2)} The author calls for increased research on the connection between political decisions and health effects. She underscores that, if accelerated, public health efforts to address the political determinants of health have the potential to bring together scholarship and action in multiple areas, including power relationships, uncertainty, complexity, political science, global health, epidemiology and the political economy of health.

Public health practitioners will find this article provides a brief, informative critique of a decade of global action (and inaction) on the political determinants of health.

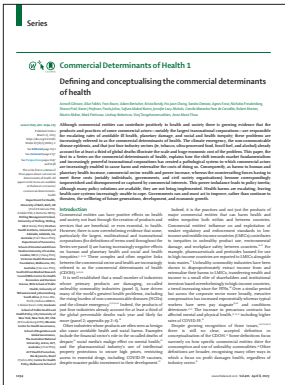


Going upstream – an umbrella review of the macroeconomic determinants of health and health inequalities

Naik Y, Baker P, Ismail SA, Tillmann T, Bash K, Quantz D, et al. [2019].

In this umbrella review, the authors ask “What are the effects of macroeconomic factors, strategies, policies and interventions on population health and health inequalities?”^{12(p2)} Their study includes 62 systematic reviews and summarizes findings across six categories: market regulation; supply of money; balance of private, public and third sectors; labour; production, consumption and distribution; and approaches to the economy.

The results of this review will support policy-makers and public health practitioners to better understand complex macroeconomic systems and take action to address economic drivers of health and health inequities.



Defining and conceptualising the commercial determinants of health

Gilmore AB, Fabbri A, Baum F, Bertscher A, Bondy K, Chang HJ, et al. [2023].

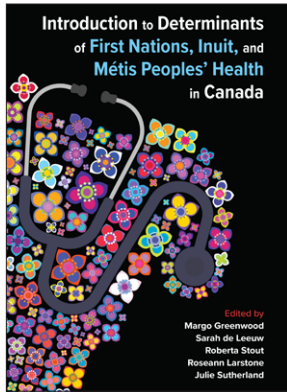
The authors of this article hold commercial and

industry actors responsible for driving avoidable and unfair health problems, including ecological damage.¹³ They discuss corporate power and name four industry sectors as being disproportionately responsible for deaths worldwide (tobacco, ultra-processed food, fossil fuel and alcohol). They offer a conceptual framework to understand how commercial determinants generate health inequities, and provide a broad, equity-focused definition for the commercial determinants of health. This definition includes diverse commercial entities and attempts to convey the complexity of interactions between commercial interests, health and equity.

Public health practitioners, policy-makers and students can use this resource to better understand the commercial determinants of health and access useful descriptions of key terms related to this concept (see Panel 1 in the paper).

See also: *Economic systems as a structural driver of population health: Introduction to workshop series (2024)*¹⁴

DETERMINANTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' HEALTH



[Introduction to determinants of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples' health in Canada](#)

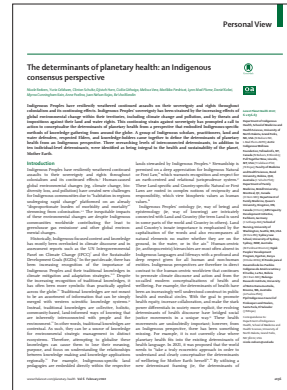
Greenwood M, de Leeuw S, Stout R, Larstone R, Sutherland J, editors. [2022].

This text uses accessible, engaging language to both

introduce readers to core concepts and support readers to combat colonialism.¹⁵ The content of the book is divided into four parts. Part I explores topics related to self-determination, children's mental wellness, Indigenous food sovereignty and reproductive health. Part II explores the geographies and ecologies of Indigenous land, health and philosophy, covering topics such as White settler violence, resource extraction, and the Inuit language, Inuktitut, as a public health issue. Parts III and IV offer a solutions-focused discussion on supporting Indigenous communities' health and practical applications for fighting colonialism. Art and poetry from First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples are interwoven throughout the text, alongside writings from Indigenous authors, including academics, community leaders and health practitioners.

This book is an ideal choice for those new to studying or those wishing to deepen their knowledge about the determinants of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples' health.

See also: [Determinants of Indigenous Peoples' health in Canada: Beyond the social](#) (2nd ed.) [2018]¹⁶



[The determinants of planetary health: An Indigenous consensus perspective](#)

Redvers N, Celidwen Y, Schultz C, Horn O, Githaiga C, Vera M, et al. [2022].

The authors of this article contend that Indigenous

knowledges are highly contextual, cannot be generalized, and are essential to conceptualize ecological determinants of health and determinants of planetary health.¹⁷ They challenge dominant individualistic, human-centric world views and discuss the relationship between capitalist and colonial ideologies and the health of all planetary systems. The authors describe 10 determinants of planetary health identified through an Indigenous-led consensus process that brought together Indigenous scholars, practitioners, land and water defenders, respected Elders, and global Knowledge Holders.

This resource supports public health practitioners, policy-makers and researchers to reflect on how various factors influence sustainability and health, and how they intersect with public health work and policy. These factors include the connections between humans and nature, and the importance of Indigenous knowledges, languages, land rights, Elders and youth.



[Bridging the commercial determinants of Indigenous health and the legacies of colonization: A critical analysis](#)

Eisenkraft Klein D,
Shawanda A. [2023].

The authors of this article begin by calling for more

further study of “the mechanisms through which industry activities intersect with colonial legacies.”^(p1) The authors focus on colonialism as the most important determinant of health inequities for Indigenous Peoples.

Public health practitioners and policy-makers can use this resource to better understand four losses of tradition related to colonization and the commercial determinants of health:

- 1) loss of traditional diets and the ultra-processed food industry;
- 2) loss of traditional ceremony and the tobacco industry;
- 3) loss of traditional knowledge and the infant formula industry; and
- 4) loss of traditional support networks and the alcohol industry.^(p1)

attention to the relationship between private sector interests and health disparities for Indigenous Peoples.¹⁸ They note this as a significant gap in the dominant scholarship related to the commercial determinants of health and call for

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