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Getting the balance right:

How can the primary health care system in Australia take account of the social determinants of health and address the long-term issues around population health while still responding to immediate need?

Outline of presentation

Address key terms:

- **Primary health care**
- **Social determinants of health**
- **Population health**

And then

- **Five actions to get the balance right**

Primary health care is:

- **Broader and from a different paradigm than primary care**
 - A health systems policy approach for health equity
 - A health systems program approach that is explicit about the social determinants of health equity and inequity

The primary health care approach includes:

- a) **Equity-focused health development/health promotion, advocacy: ie, action on social determinants of health**
and
- b) **screening, risk assessment, diagnosis, early intervention, treatment and rehabilitation**

Action o equity requires a) + b)

Principles of PHC

Declaration of Primary Health Care (WHO 1978):

1. Commitment to shift health resources from services based on medical model to social model of health in community based settings
2. Greater mobilization of community health workers
3. An explicit linkage between health and its social and environmental determinants

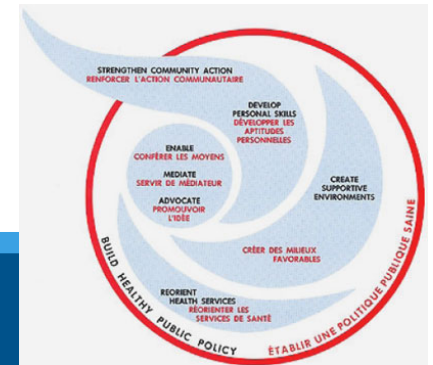
Essential elements of a PHC approach

- **Advocacy on social equity and health inequities**
- **Community development and intersectoral work to support health-creating environments**
- **Enabling and strength building of communities**
- **Curbing of voracious medical budgets**
- **Support for expenditure on community building and equity-focused health promotion**
- **Community engagement to reach out to vulnerable groups**
- **Includes a wide range of upstream activities not provided as client services**

Determinants of health – 1980s

- The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (WHO 1986) identified 8 key determinants of health:

Peace
Shelter
Education
Food
Income
A stable eco-system
Sustainable resources
Social justice, and
Equity



WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health (CSDH)



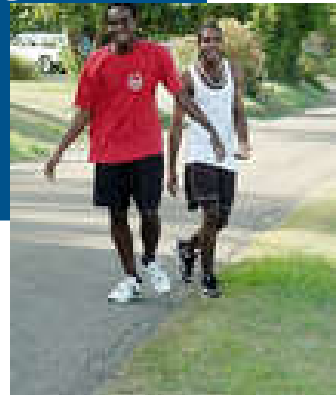
2005: WHO established the CSDH

The evidence gathered makes clear the need for national action via serious, pragmatic policies and interventions that can reduce health inequality through action on social factors

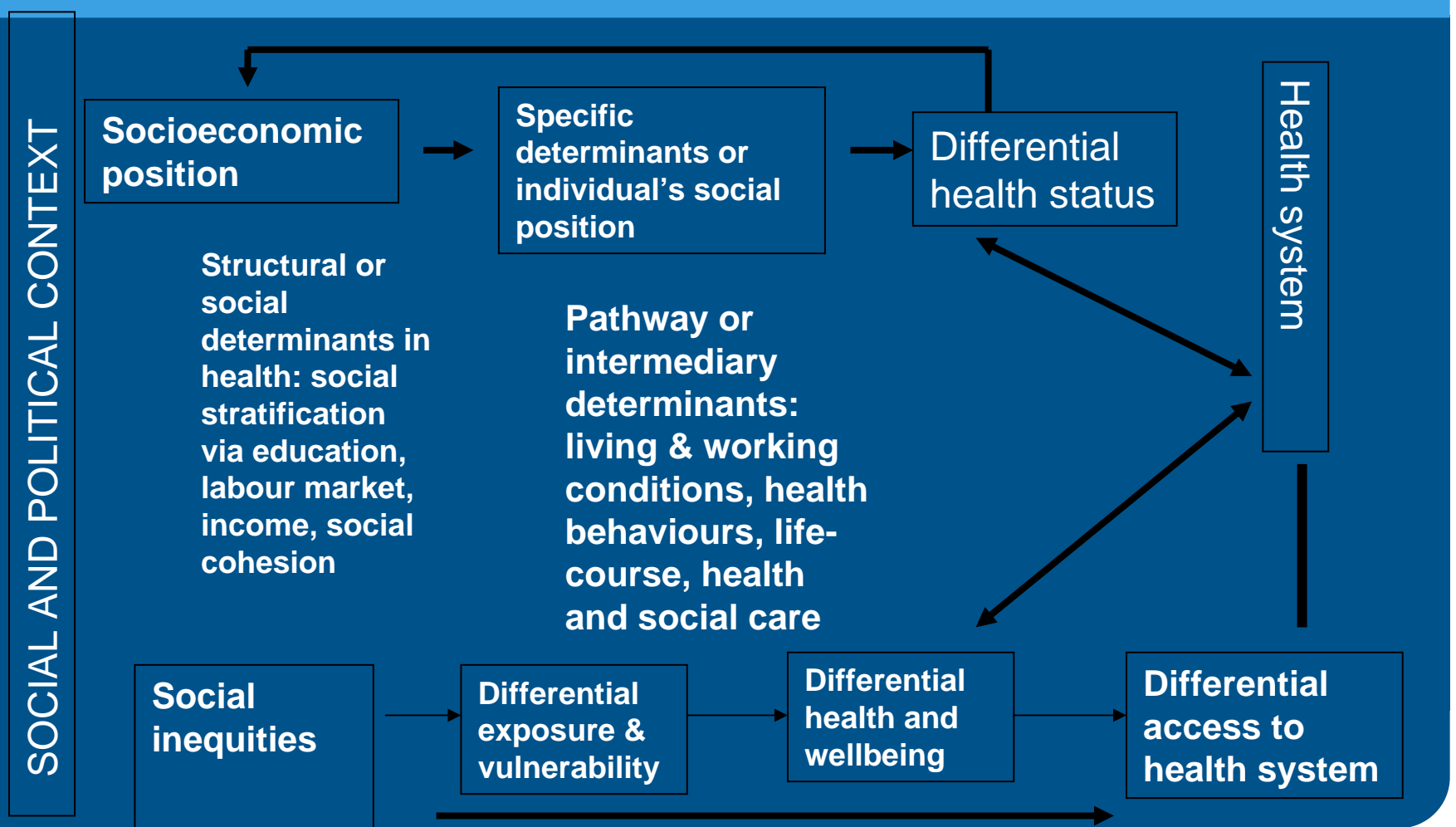
SDH

Specific features of the social context that affect health and the pathways by which social conditions translate into health impacts

The SDH that merit attention are those that can potentially be altered by informed action (CSDH 2006).



SDH Conceptual Framework (WHO:CSDH 06)



The determinants of health

Structural determinants are those that generate social stratification

- **income & social status**
- **gender**
- **ethnicity**
- **sexuality**
- **education**
- **employment & working conditions**

Intermediate determinants determine differences in exposure and vulnerability to health compromising conditions:

eg health literacy

- food access
- population behaviours (may be cultural)
- psychosocial barriers to adopting healthy lifestyles

Population health investments

Investments in health...

UPSTREAM

- **Socio-ecological:** acknowledges the influence of the contexts in which we live our lives (e.g. social, economic, environmental political)
- **Behavioural:** individual responsibility (e.g. behaviour change campaigns such as anti-smoking, safe sex)
- **Biomedical:** diagnosis, treatment, prevention (e.g. immunisation, risk assessment)

DOWNSTREAM

Population health

- **Upstream ↔ downstream**
- **A set of approaches that deal with causes of ill health more distal than just downstream factors**

If the predictors of poor health are...

- **Low income**
- **Social exclusion**
- **Lack of shelter**
- **Food insecurity**
- **Shortage of social-health services**
- **Health literacy**
- **Discrimination**
- **Sub-optimal early childhood**
- **Violence**
- **Gender**
- **Cultural influences**
- **Personal coping skills**
- **Environments**

Getting the balance right

- Then, how can the primary health care system in Australia take account of the social determinants of health and address the long-term issues around population health while still responding to immediate need?

1: Develop a position statement on the social determinants, and the primary health-primary care continuum

Tackling the SDH requires actions and interventions beyond the primary care sector

How will primary care coordinate with those agencies working to influence the SDH?

2: Develop an equity framework for general practice

The CSDH points to the need for more deliberate action on equity –

develop indicators that will demonstrate over time, how the primary care sector is tackling access and equity with an emphasis on disadvantaged groups

The health system is regarded as both a determinant of health and a determinant of inequity and therefore, has an important role in reducing inequalities

3: Support cross sector services

Articulate the role of cross sector health and social services to support communities and tackle disadvantage through action on social and environmental determinants - health development is necessary to tackle the SDH and connect health with other determinants

The community health and social sectors provide models of service delivery and integrated health development that cannot be provided in the primary care sector – we need all three sectors if health inequities are to be reduced

Community health is a poor cousin in Federal policy terms

- Focus has been on General Practice since 1990s with considerable national strategy
- Ambivalence to community health by primary care providers has not been challenged by any jurisdiction

4: Support National PHC strategy

Support a National Primary Health Care strategy that articulates the SDH and the types of actions that are needed to support the health of all people with emphasis on equity and disadvantage

We lack a National Primary Health Care strategy that supports deliberate efforts to influence the social determinants of health

5. Support national commitment to SDH

Support a national approach to reviewing the outputs of the Commission on the Social Determinants of Health and determine how Australia can do better in addressing disadvantage

Ensure that a National Primary Health Care Policy is based on the evidence about the social determinants of health and what works for people living in poverty and disadvantage— the reports of the CSDH will be invaluable in this regard

References

- **WHO (1978). Alma Ata Declaration on Primary Health Care. Geneva, World Health Organization.**
- **WHO (1986). Ottawa Charter on Health Promotion. Geneva, World Health Organization.**
- **WHO (2005). Commission on the Social Determinants of Health. Background paper. Geneva, World Health Organization**
- **WHO (2006). Commission on the Social Determinants of Health (2005). Towards a Conceptual Framework for Analysis and Action on the Social Determinants of Health. Geneva, World Health Organization.**