

## Definition of Health

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), health is not only the absence of disease but a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being (Maurer & Smith, 2013). This definition has allowed us to see that the concept of health is very diverse and comprised of many different factors. Health is influenced by physical, emotional, societal, and economic variables, to name a few. It is important to note that although disease is a relatively objective pathologic phenomenon, wellness and illness are subjective experiences---different for every individual. For example, someone can be physically well, but socially and mentally unwell. Our individual culture impacts how we perceive our health, wellness, and illness states.

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[Health Belief Model](#)

[Health Promotion Models](#)

So, health can be measured on many dimensions and that is what public health does through looking at both quality and quantity. Public health studies many different health outcomes for a population but they are usually measures of disease, morbidity or mortality. They fail to capture the true measures of health. However, public health surveillance moved forward in the 1990's to begin to identify specific factors that could negatively or positively influence incidence of diseases as well as morbidity and mortality statistics. Some of these included cigarette smoking, sedentary lifestyle and stress; and their influences on the incidence of heart disease. Public health also identified other variables that could also influence health such as educational level, ethnicity, culture, socioeconomic level, and literacy. These are a few of the determinants of health that are considered with disease incidence, morbidity and mortality.



### Influences on Health

When public health opened the door to looking at behavior and the environment and its influence on health, the types and numbers of risk factors around health grew. Although these many categories of risk factors are organized differently, there are traditional categories of risks that influence health. Biologic factors, environmental factors, immunological factors, nutritional factors, genetic factors, and services, social factors, and spiritual factors are included and are referenced as the "BEINGS" model of disease causes. Some of these factors are easy to influence and can result in the improvement in health; whereas, others are not amenable to change.

### Models of Health Promotion

From these various influences on health, a wide variety of conceptual models have grown for public health professionals to use in working with vulnerable individuals, groups, and communities. First is the **health-belief model**, which is used frequently to explain health and illness behaviors. It supports that individuals will take action to avoid disease and illness and are motivated by: 1) a sense of susceptibility to the disease, 2) the perceived severity of the disease, 3) the perceived benefits of preventive health behaviors, and 4) the perceived barriers to taking action to prevent the disease. This health-belief model has been widely tested and studied with many populations. As an example, consider breast cancer. The health-belief model would hypothesize that a woman would consider her family history of breast cancer (susceptibility), the serious nature of a cancer diagnosis (severity), the fact that mammography can identify cancer early (benefits), and the possible discomfort of a mammogram, time off of work for appointment, transportation, etc. (barriers). All these facets would influence the health behavior of the individual.

A second public health model of health promotion is the **primary health care model**. The focus of this model is health care for all members of the community with a multi-sectoral approach. This model

stresses the power of community participation and a multi-sectoral approach with an emphasis on prevention. There are six key elements which include environment, economics, politics, education/communication, health services and agriculture/nutrition. The execution of this model in a community setting stresses that the health of the community is based upon many resources being available and is action oriented.

The health-belief model and the primary health care model are both used in helping people to improve their health. These models provide a guide for public health professionals to assess the targeted group of people or the community and plan programs and services that reflect the assessment of their definition of health along with their beliefs and resources in the community.

#### References:

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