



HIV/AIDS and Social Determinants of Health

Many of the root causes of HIV/AIDS are linked to more than simply engaging in high risk activities. The question is: Why do people engage in high risk activities related to the transmission of HIV?

Canada's health system recognizes that social determinants (DoH) affect health outcomes significantly, playing a bigger role than even genes, behaviours or medical care. Social determinants of health are estimated to account for 50% of variations in health care.

What are social determinants of health?

Social determinants of health (DoH) are factors related to an individual's personal, social and economic background, as well as the environment in which they live.

DoH affect a person's ability to engage in prevention of illness, as well as the ability to seek and pay for treatment and cope with illness. Twelve social determinants that affect health outcomes in Canada include:

- Income and Social Status;
- Social Support Networks;
- Education;
- Employment and Working Conditions;
- Social Environment;
- Physical Environment;
- Personal Health Practices;
- Early Child Development;
- Biology and Genetics;
- Health Care System;
- Gender;
- Culture.

Recognizing the importance of social determinants of health acknowledges that health is greatly affected by the distribution of resources and that social inequities are often a key cause of illness.

How Social Determinants of Health Affect HIV

Vulnerability to HIV and the progression of HIV, in particular, are influenced by DoH. Risk of contracting HIV is greater among individuals who are subject to power imbalances, homelessness, general lack of resources, both financial and educational, early childhood abuse and social exclusion caused by stigma, cultural differences and discrimination in the forms of racism, sexism, homophobia, heterosexism or ageism.

Responding to the Social Determinants of Health

Addressing all of the social determinants of health is a key strategy in ending the epidemic in Canada. Ensuring that basic human needs, such as employment, shelter, food, education, and social inclusion, are met will significantly prevent the transmission of HIV and lessen its impact on people living with the virus.

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Production of this information sheet has been made possible through a financial contribution from the Public Health Agency of Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of the Public Health Agency of Canada.

