

# Social Determinants of Health

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**Wellesley Institute Submission to the World Health Organization: Social Determinants of Health Into Action**

The World Health Organization's Commission on the Social Determinants of Health has sparked broad interest in tackling persistent and widening health inequalities by addressing the social and economic inequality, precarious employment, poverty, inadequate housing, social exclusion and other fundamental factors that underlie these health inequalities. The Commission set out an "exhaustive overview of what measures are possible, across different sectors, to act on the social determinants to improve health and reduce health inequalities." In October 2011, WHO is sponsoring a global conference on how to implement the Commission's recommendations.

- for action on social determinants;
- 4. monitoring progress: measurement and analysis to inform policies;
- 5. global action: aligning priorities and stakeholders.

The Wellesley Institute does a great deal of research, policy analysis and community engagement and mobilization on health equity and the social determinants of health. From this base we provide detailed input on four of the themes. This is not meant to be comprehensive; rather we are speaking to several particularly complex and often neglected facets of driving action on social

## Policy Action on Social Determinants of Health (October, 2011)

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Social determinants are complex and fundamental change across many

inter-connected sectors will be key. But ultimately, significant and sustained change in the determinants of health will require equally significant shifts in state policy and comprehensive and multi-faceted government programs and investments; and part of this is ensuring that policy solutions are aligned with the structural incentives that drive government policy and action. Two policy briefs set out how this can be done.

**Wellesley Institute Submission to the Pan American Health Organization: Social Determinants of Health Into Action**

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Each WHO region is preparing a position paper for the conference. The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) is conducting a final consultation to collect recommendations for the paper. It asked for three recommendations regarding the social determinants of health. The Wellesley Institute does a great deal of research, policy analysis and community engagement and mobilization on health equity and the social determinants of health. We recommended three lines of action that governments could take to:

- to reduce on employment, gender and other inequalities in labour market outcomes, and the adverse impact of precarious work, and to enhance the impact of skills training, child care and parental policies, foreign trade, retirement, and flexible and responsive social assistance on individual and community opportunities.
- Each national, sub-national and local government or planning authority should develop and implement comprehensive strategies to reduce health inequalities.
- The content, structure, diversity and dynamics of health inequalities and overall policy instruments, vary between countries, and this means that the role of policy directions and levels will necessarily vary.
- However, they will include a mix of action addressing the social determinants most of health inequity.

**Comprehensive Community Initiatives: Promising Solutions for "Wicked" Problems**

February 2011

Bob Gardner, PhD  
Executive Director, Health and Public Policy Institute  
Wellesley Institute, Wellesley

This article examines "wicked" public problems because:

- They are complex, multi-faceted, and often intractable.
- They involve multiple stakeholders with conflicting interests.
- They require a long-term, sustained effort to address.

## Addressing "Wicked" Policy Problems

This article for the federal government's online journal *Horizon's* carries forward the analysis of comprehensive community initiatives to argue that they have great policy potential. It sets out the policy, regulatory, funding and capacity building enablers that can achieve this potential. [www.wellesleyinstitute.com/blog/policysolutions-for-wicked-and-complex-social-problems/](http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/blog/policysolutions-for-wicked-and-complex-social-problems/)

**Building Action on the Social Determinants of Health**

Subcommittee on Population Health  
Senate Committee on Social Affairs,  
Science and Technology

February 2009

## Canadian Policy Action (March, 2009)

This earlier policy brief sets out a broad overview of government policy, investments and actions needed to address determinant of health. It emphasizes the importance of cross-government and department policy coordination, adapting policies to local conditions and opportunities, and supporting innovation in addressing health inequalities at a community level.

**Comprehensive Community Initiatives: the Promise of Realist Evaluation and Driving Community Change**

Tamarack Institute Workshop on Evaluating Community Impact  
Bob Gardner, Wellesley Institute

problems they were trying to solve.

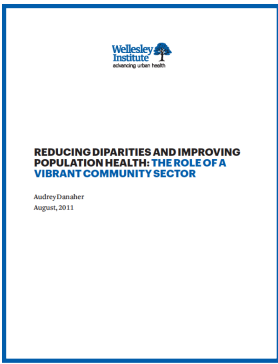
It was asked to discuss:

- the experience of comprehensive community initiatives and their potential to address complex social problems such as deep-rooted poverty and health inequalities;
- how to understand and evaluate the impact of such complex community initiatives;
- more specifically, to examine as a realist method one approach to how to understand, evaluate and measure community-level initiatives, including the role of the local government, funding and resources; community-level and other non-governmental organizations;
- the workshop will discuss the role of realist evaluation in the context of research with and for local governments, and the local government's role in research initiatives, who plays a leading role in local government research on social determinants.

The following are the questions raised in the workshop:

## Comprehensive Community Initiatives (June, 2011)

A pre-condition for advancing health equity is building the broad community and political mobilization needed to force the necessary major policy changes and addressing determinants on the ground at local levels. This research examines the potential of broad community collaborations and cross-sectoral initiatives to address the roots of poverty and inequality.



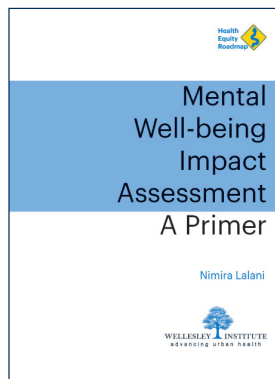
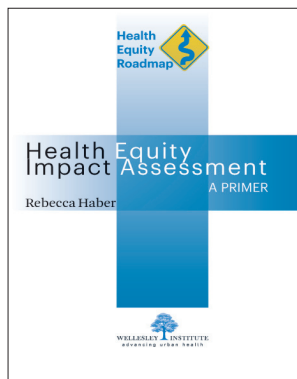
### Cross-Sectoral Coordination and Action (August, 2011)

Critical to successful comprehensive community initiatives, and a central feature of strategies to address social determinants of health, is cross-sectoral collaboration among different levels of government, service providers, community organizers, business and other key stakeholders. This research paper examines the conditions for effective cross-sectoral action.



### Evidence-Based Planning Tools: Health Equity Impact Assessment

To drive health equity into action we need to understand the needs of health disadvantaged populations, identify barriers to equitable access to quality care, and build equity into priority setting, resource allocation and performance management. That means we need a repertoire of effective equity-focused planning tools. HEIA is one key tool that analyzes the potential impact of service, program or policy changes on health disparities and/or health disadvantaged populations. It can help to plan new services or initiatives, assess and re-align existing programs, and build awareness of equity within organizations.



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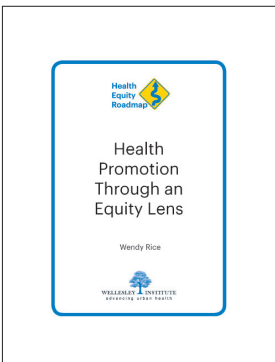
HEIA arose out of best practices, assessments, used for 15 years. HEIA tools are used for development, to social determinants of health, in disparities. The jurisdictions, practitioners, and other resources.

**online resource**

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[JK group takes government to court over gender-based analysis](#)

Wellesley does a great deal of work on building equity into One way to do this is through equity focused planning tool Assessment and gender-based analysis. In a recent examination of the coalition government's emergency budget r



### Health Promotion Through an Equity Lens (December, 2010)

Health promotion is crucial to keeping people well and preventing illness. A major challenge is that many programs do not take peoples' unequal conditions and opportunities into account, are consequently not effective for vulnerable and marginalized communities, and can actually make disparities worse if they are taken up disproportionately by the more advantaged. This paper analyzes how equity can be built into health promotion.

The Wellesley Institute is a Toronto-based non-profit and non-partisan research and policy institute. Our focus is on developing research and community-based policy solutions to the problems of urban health and health disparities.

