

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

Social & Community Context

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Florida
TaxWatch

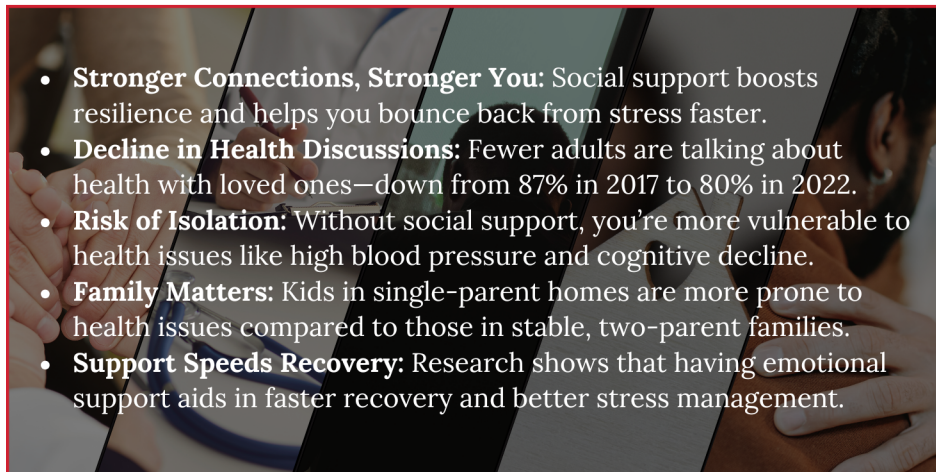


INTRODUCTION

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), social determinants of health (SDOH) are environmental conditions that impact the health of individuals. These include where a person is born, and their economic background. SDOH can be broken down into five groups:¹

1. Health Care Access and Quality;
2. Education Access and Quality;
3. Neighborhood and Built Environment;
4. Social and Community Context; and
5. Economic Stability.

This commentary, the fourth of a five-part series, will focus on the social and community context. Existing research indicates that cultivating healthy social relationships and community initiatives have a positive relationship with overall health and well-being. Social support, community-driven health initiatives, community participation, and adolescent bullying all have an impact on a person's quality of health.



INDIVIDUALS WITH SOCIAL SUPPORT TEND TO EXHIBIT GREATER RESILIENCE TO STRESS.

Social support involves having friends and family to discuss concerns with and receive help in managing them. Research shows that a lack of social support increases the risk of physical and mental health problems.² The Health Information National Trends Survey (HINTS) is an annual survey that monitors the changing environment of health communication. The 2017 and 2022 survey data show a decline in the percentage of U.S. adults who talk to friends and family members about their health, from 86.9 percent in 2017 to 79.6 percent in 2022.³ Why is the decline a concern? Research indicates that a lack of social support places individuals at a greater risk of physical and psychological health problems.

The American Psychological Association references a 2022 study that examines resiliency to stress and social support by having participants complete public speaking and mental arithmetic tasks with and without support. The researchers found social support strengthens resilience in stressful situations and heightened the recovery of positive mood.⁴ In addition, the APA recognizes emotional support to be associated with health problems including high blood pressure, diminished immunity, cardiovascular disease, and cognitive decline.⁵ A 2003 study on the effects of family structure on child well-being found that children growing up in single-parent homes were more likely to experience health problems (e.g., accidents, injuries, and poisonings) than children growing up in families with both parents in a low-conflict marriage.⁶

1 "Social Determinants of Health." *Health.gov*. Accessed August 28, 2024.

2 "Increase the Proportion of Adults Who Talk to Friends or Family About Their Health (HCHIT-04)." *Health.gov*. Accessed August 28, 2024.

3 National Cancer Institute. *HINTS 5 Cycle 2 Methodology Report*. Published August 2022.

4 Guro Engvig Løseth, Marie Eikemo, Martin Trøstheim, Isabell M. Meier, Herman Bjørnstad, Anna Asratian, Claudia Pazmandi, Vegard Wathne Tangen, Markus Heilig, Siri Leknes, Stress recovery with social support: A dyadic stress and support task, *Psych neuroendocrinology*, Volume 146, 2022.

5 American Psychological Association. "Managing Stress: Social Support." Accessed August 28, 2024.

6 Mary Parke, "Are Married Parents Really Better for Children? What Research Says About the Effects of Family Structure on Child Well-Being." Center for Law and Social Policy, May 2003.

CHILDREN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED A PARENT OR GUARDIAN WHO SERVED TIME IN JAIL OR PRISON ARE AT A GREATER RISK OF FACING SOCIAL CHALLENGES

The Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates 5.1% or roughly 1/20 of the U.S. population will be confined to a state or federal prison during their lifetime.⁷ This number is likely to increase as the incarceration rate has increased 220 percent from 1980 to 2014 according to a 2016 report published by the Council of Economic Advisors (an agency within the Executive Office of the President).⁸ Further, the 2020-2021 National Survey of Children’s Health discovered 6.5 percent of children 17 years and under have experienced a parent or guardian who has served time in jail or prison.⁹

The U.S. Department of Health asserts that interventions to help people get the social and community support they need are critical from improving health and well-being especially children whose parents are in jail. Policies that assist parents and offer parenting education can positively affect children with a parent who has been incarcerated.¹⁰

The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) analyzed the hidden consequences of parent incarceration on dependent children. According to the NIJ report published in 2017 “[T]he most common consequence of parental incarceration appears to fall under the umbrella of antisocial behavior.” Continuing, the article states “[O]ne meta-analysis of 40 studies on children of incarcerated parents found that antisocial behaviors were present more consistently than any other factors, including mental health issues and drug use.”¹¹

A NEGATIVE CORRELATION EXISTS BETWEEN ADOLESCENT BULLYING AND HEALTHY DIETARY CHOICES

The dietary decisions we make daily are important to overall individual health and longevity. Three of the top 15 risk factors for early death in 2021 were dietary risk factors.¹² Number 8 is high sodium, #10 is low fruit, and #12 is low whole grains.¹³ All three happen to be behavioral risks, meaning individuals have voluntary control over their ability to improve their personal health.

The presence of bullying has increased significantly among adolescents during recent years which can have negative impacts to the individual’s psychological and physical health due to poor dietary choices. A 2018 study¹⁴ looked at the relationship between bullying and dietary choices. Bullying was negatively correlated with all the dietary habits, except for fast food, sweets, commercially baked goods, and breakfast consumption (i.e., the presence of bullying is positively correlated with eating fast food, sweets, commercially baked goods, and skipping breakfast). Further, empirical research indicates a connection between higher rates of bullying and depression with lower adherence to dietary moderation. Thus, individuals who experience more bullying and depression are more likely to engage in less controlled or unhealthy eating habits.¹⁵

7 Bureau of Justice Statistics. *Lifetime Likelihood of Going to State or Federal Prison*. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, August 2021.

8 Council of Economic Advisers. *Criminal Justice Reform: The Economic Benefits of Reducing Crime and Incarceration*. White House, October 2016.

9 Health.gov. “National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH).” Accessed August 28, 2024.

10 Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. “Reduce the Proportion of Children with a Parent or Guardian Who Has Served Time in Jail or Prison — SDOH-05.” *Healthy People 2030*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Accessed August 30, 2024.

11 U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice. *Hidden Consequences: The Impact of Incarceration on Dependent Children*. NCJ 250349. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2017.

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14 Albaladejo-Blázquez, N., Ferrer-Cascales, R., Ruiz-Robledillo, N., Sánchez-Sansegundo, M., Clement-Carbonell, V., & Zaragoza-Martí, A. (2018). Poor Dietary Habits in Bullied Adolescents: The Moderating Effects of Diet on Depression. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 15(8), 1569.

15 Albaladejo-Blázquez, N., Ferrer-Cascales, R., Ruiz-Robledillo, N., Sánchez-Sansegundo, M., Clement-Carbonell, V., & Zaragoza-Martí, A. (2018). Poor Dietary Habits in Bullied Adolescents: The Moderating Effects of Diet on Depression. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 15(8), 1569.



CREATING HEALTHIER COMMUNITY-LEVEL ENVIRONMENTS CAN ADDRESS PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUES LIKE OBESITY

The American Journal of Preventive Medicine published a recent study aimed at discovering the impact of various community-level initiatives designed to reduce obesity. The study included 12 low-income communities consisting of 10,000-20,000 residents. The effectiveness of 233 different policy, environmental, and programmatic strategies was compared. The researchers concluded that high-dose (referring to the product of strength and reach) obesity prevention strategies can lead to improved health behaviors in the youth community. Policy changes concerning active recess and clinical staff protocol yielded the best results. Further, the research suggests that the most effective strategies (i.e., high-dose) were more prevalent in communities with the longest duration of investment.

Additionally, parents, teachers, and staff encouraging students to engage in steady physical activity resulted in a 19 percent increase in moderate or vigorous physical activity during recess. The clinic's educational and promotional strategies led to a 40 percent increase in body mass index (BMI) screenings, and physical activity incentives (i.e., soccer balls) were distributed to patients in 90 percent of encounters. Why is this important? The initiatives mentioned were successful efforts at changing behavior and impacting long-term obesity rates.¹⁶

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN CIVIC ACTIVITIES, SUCH AS VOTING, CAN EMPOWER COMMUNITIES TO ADVOCATE FOR BETTER OVERALL HEALTH

According to the Current Population Survey (CPS) produced by the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2018 53.4 percent of U.S. citizens 18 years and older voted in the federal, state, and/or local November election. That percentage decreased slightly to 52.2 percent in 2022. Segmenting the voting data gives us even more information. In the same year, the groups with the lowest voter turnout were 18-24 age range (27.6 percent) and less than high school education (25.9 percent). Further, white U.S. adults had a marginally higher voter turnout than every other ethnicity.¹⁷

A 2013 study examined the relationship between health and voter turnout in 30 countries. The results reveal that poor health reduces voting participation, with social connectedness partially mediating the relationship between health and voter turnout. This may translate to a higher concentration of healthy people turning in their ballots.¹⁸ Why does it matter that healthy people are more likely to vote? A subsequent study found that this creates a health bias in political voice. The results indicate healthy voters are less likely to vote for health expenditures. Fundamentally, voting gives people the opportunity to contribute to the decisions that may directly or indirectly impact their health.¹⁹



Did you know healthy individuals are more likely to vote?
Engaging in civic activities empowers communities to advocate for better health.

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CONCLUSION

The major takeaway from this commentary is that social relationships and health are inherently linked— investments in strengthening social relationships are investments in health. Those with good social and community relationships generally experience better health throughout their adult lives.

Our decisions which ultimately affect our health are influenced by the environment in which we live. All this is to say an emphasis on improving the sociological aspects of our lives could prove to create positive health outcomes moving forward. Encouraging parents to raise their children in a safe, healthy, and loving environment is key to achieving strong and healthy children and families.

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As an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit taxpayer research institute and government watchdog, it is the mission of Florida TaxWatch to provide the taxpayers of Florida and public officials with high quality, independent research and analysis of issues related to state and local government taxation, expenditures, policies, and programs. Florida TaxWatch works to improve the productivity and accountability of Florida government. Its research recommends productivity enhancements and explains the statewide impact of fiscal and economic policies and practices on citizens and businesses.

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Through rigorous research, innovative solutions, and collaborative partnerships, the Institute strives to shape policies and practices that enhance the well-being and longevity of Florida's residents.

Have a Research Inquiry?

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