

# INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR HEALTH PROMOTION AND EDUCATION POSITION STATEMENT ON THE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

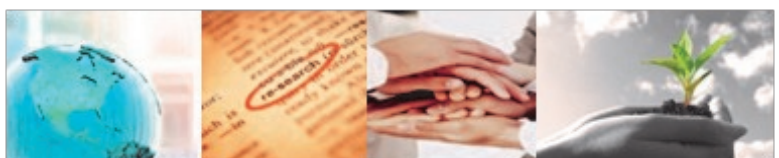
*A document developed on the occasion of the  
World Conference on the Social Determinants of Health  
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, October 2011*

**Advancing health promotion & achieving equity in health globally**



**IUHPE – UIPES**

INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR HEALTH PROMOTION AND EDUCATION  
UNION INTERNATIONALE DE PROMOTION DE LA SANTÉ ET D'ÉDUCATION POUR LA SANTÉ  
UNIÓN INTERNACIONAL DE PROMOCIÓN DE LA SALUD Y EDUCACIÓN PARA LA SALUD



## Background

The International Union for Health Promotion and Education (IUHPE) is a global, independent and professional network in the field of health promotion. Since its creation over sixty years ago, the IUHPE has been committed to advancing health equity by facilitating exchange between researchers, practitioners and policy-makers and through dissemination of examples of programmes, community action and healthy public policy from around the world. Recognizing the principles of social justice that underpin health promotion strategies and activities, the IUHPE has focused its efforts to promote dialogue that can address the growing health inequalities experienced both between and within countries. The inequitable distribution of the social determinants of health is considered as unjust because the resulting health inequalities shaped by socially constructed determinants are avoidable.

In conjunction with the release of the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health (CSDH) Report issuing a call for global action, the IUHPE renewed its commitment as an advocate of the social determinants agenda and strongly supported discussions around implementing the report's recommendations. Specifically, the IUHPE contributes to the Social Determinants of Health agenda by supporting the development of a health promotion response to various challenges facing this agenda globally, including those related to: facilitating dialogue, increasing capacity, advancing knowledge, and improving dissemination. The work is aligned with the organization's strategies and carried out across a range of partnership initiatives. The IUHPE's Global Working Group on Social Determinants of Health provides a unique combination of global experts with experience that supports an ongoing identification of issues and opportunities, and a forum to convene them for further reflection.

The IUHPE recognises the need for a variety of actors to collaborate and efforts to convene to advance the development of a social determinants agenda at the national and global levels. The IUHPE proposes that health promotion is a vital part of the global social progress agenda, and it would like to affirm that health promotion, as a field of action, has a vital role in the continued effort to improve policies and programs that aim to tackle the Social Determinants of Health.

On the occasion of the World Conference on the Social Determinants in Health, convened by WHO in Rio de Janeiro from 19-21 October 2011, the IUHPE reflected on its vision of key areas that require attention in order to support the implementation of effective, equitable and sustainable action on social determinants of health. Taking advantage of this opportunity to bring together Member States and stakeholders to share experiences on policies and strategies aiming to reduce health inequities, the IUHPE calls for discussions to address a range of challenges.

### **In particular, the IUHPE calls for:**

- 1. Developing evidence of effective action on the social determinants of health inequities**
- 2. Disseminating resources, best practices and tools to support action on health equity**
- 3. Building workforce capacity**
- 4. Engaging dialogue on governance**
- 5. Greater investment in health promotion**

## 1- Developing evidence of effective action on the social determinants of health inequities

While there is extensive available evidence to describe the problem, nature and impact of social determinants of health and their complex relation to the creation of social inequalities in health, there is a critical need to develop further evidence of what works to address the unequal distribution of such determinants. Much of the research on social inequalities in health has been traditionally addressed from an epidemiological perspective. While epidemiology has a strong disciplinary approach to the biomedical perspective it is less strong in a sociocultural approach rooted in the social and behavioural sciences. This lack of perspective limits the understanding of how sociocultural factors interact, are interlinked and articulated. As a result, there is a need for the mobilisation of sociological approaches. The IUHPE Global Working Group on Health Promotion Research, the IUHPE Global Programme on Health Promotion Effectiveness (GPHPE) and the IUHPE Global Working Group on Social Determinants of Health can contribute to shedding the light on understanding these dimensions.

The Commission on Social Determinants of Health called for a global movement to act on its recommendations. It is however unclear how countries and different stakeholders can develop strategies that would address the social determinants of health as there is little evidence on how to design practices that address effectively the Social Determinants of Health. Through its Global Program on Health Promotion Effectiveness (GPHPE), the IUHPE is engaged in documenting evidence of effective health promotion at the grassroots, national and regional levels. In that venture efforts are made to ensure effective knowledge transfer and dialogue between researchers, practitioners and decisions makers. What is clear in the search for evidence to date is that there are many possible effective approaches that take a broad perspective. What is also clear is that, because of conventional approaches to the area favouring single risk factor and/or individual behavioral modification approaches consuming most of the resources and programme monies for action programmes, that relatively little has been funded that takes a broader health promoting perspective. Because of these funding limitations, many in the field of health promotion have begun to address solutions in the realms of governance and health in all policies as an alternative to traditional biomedical interventions. What is now recognized is the need for facilitating work, research and dialogue on the broad topic of governance.

## 2- Disseminating resources, best practices and tools to support action on health equity

It is critical to offer platforms that facilitate the translation and exchange of knowledge and practice that contribute to advance health promotion strategies addressing the Social Determinants of Health. This includes providing tools and mechanisms for exchange on policy development, advocacy and practice to support working with other sectors and vulnerable populations and the wide dissemination of knowledge to health promotion practitioners as well as to policy-makers and government officials. The IUHPE believes that improving policy and practice can be facilitated through policy dialogues, exchanges and translation of experiences from different countries and regions.

Governments may consider the cost benefits of the social determinants approach when advocating for greater investment in health promotion. As outlined by the DETERMINE Consortium, measures to ensure fairer health outcomes for all contribute to stimulate people's ability to achieve their potential and thereby optimize economic productivity. They also contribute to reducing excess mortality and health care costs and improving quality of life for all members of society. In that perspective, health equity economic assessments should be incorporated in decision-making processes.

### **3- Building workforce capacity**

The call for action set up by the WHO Commission on Social determinants of health involves the need for a complex blend of technical skills, expertise and leadership of individuals, organisations and countries across the globe. This requires that the relevant workforce be equipped with the core health promotion skills and competencies to implement policies and practice that contribute to act on the wider and structural determinants of health at the global level and particularly in countries with identified capacity needs. The IUHPE is engaged with partners to develop global consensus around domains of core competency for health promotion that should inform the supply of an expanded and skilled workforce of health promotion professionals.

### **4- Engaging dialogue on governance**

In developing a health promotion approach to Social Determinants of Health, we need to consider the role, commitment and perspectives from all stakeholders including that of international organisations, governments, NGOs and community based organisations as well as the private sector. This requires building strong alliances and partnerships among all sectors based on agreed ethical principles, mutual understanding and respect.

There is an acknowledgement of the need to facilitate work, research and dialogue on the broad topic of governance as a means to improve the work across sectors in government and to also address collaboration with civil society and the private sector. The Health in All Policies is recognised as an approach at the national level which encourages intersectoral governance for intersectoral action. This work needs to be reviewed in terms of experiences and outcomes of governance structures and the actions which have emerged from this approach. However this agenda at the global level also presents an opportunity for encouraging work across the span of UN agencies to collaborate in their work to contribute to shaping the global conditions that support equity between countries. Finally there is a need to systematically monitor progress on action aimed at reducing health inequalities and to tracking progress in policy development and implementation so that accountability frameworks can be explored.

### **5- Greater investment in health promotion**

The Social Determinants of Health models reflect how other sectors are vitally responsible for population outcomes. In that perspective, governments and health systems should give greater priority to improving engagement with other policy sectors, promoting health in all policies approaches and capitalising on resulting co-benefits. This necessitates an increase and reconstitution of the resource base for health promotion. Health promotion is an essential function of the departments of health, and should be considered as such.

It is therefore essential to encourage increased investment in health promotion by governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations, academic institutions and the private sector. The expansion of health promotion needs to be explicit and adequately funded. Within this commitment, health systems need to invest in research on the evidence of effectiveness and cost effectiveness of health promotion policies and interventions. New paradigms for knowledge translation, exchange and use should be explored to ensure that the interface of research, policy and practice is supporting these connections.

Given the particular challenges that countries from the South are confronted with, health promotion approaches should be supported as a development issue in order to ensure that critical values such as equity, social justice and sustainability are addressed to inform the development of healthy public policies. Donors need to incorporate health promotion action on Social Determinants of Health in development assistance projects, which would constitute a useful way to secure more resources for Low and Middle Income Countries for health promotion.

In light of the IUHPE position and call herein, with respect to action on the social determinants of health, the **IUHPE remains committed to:**

- furthering the discussion and debate on challenges for action on the Social Determinants of Health, with the aim of advancing collective reflection on these issues through various dissemination channels globally.
- improving scientific knowledge and evidence on what works, including reflection on the perspectives and methods from which research on social determinants of health may benefit.
- contributing to international efforts that develop capacity of professionals and decision-makers to address Social Determinants of Health.
- facilitating dialogue on policy and practice, specifically sharing experiences of practices to improve the effectiveness of actions at various levels globally.



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