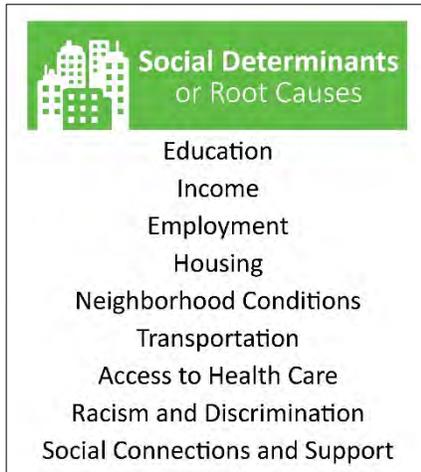


Examples: Conditions That Affect Health and Child Development

Here are some examples of social, economic and environmental conditions that affect the health of children and families. (These conditions are sometimes called “social determinants of health.”) This list is just a start, but it may help applicants think about the many complex and interconnected factors that impact children’s development and well-being.



Education

Education opens the doors to opportunities and resources that lead to a higher socioeconomic status^{1,2}. More education is associated with higher-paying jobs and the benefits that come with those jobs, like financial security, health insurance, healthier working conditions and social connections. Education also gives us the tools we need to make choices about our health. People who have more years of education tend to live longer and have better health. Education also affects health across generations, because children of more educated parents tend to be healthier and do better in school.

Income

Income is one of the strongest predictors of health^{3,4}. People with higher incomes and greater wealth generally enjoy better health and live longer than people with lower incomes. On average, the more money you make, the healthier you are. Individuals and communities with higher incomes are more likely to have safe homes and neighborhoods, access to health care, grocery stores with healthy foods and good schools. On the other hand, people living in poverty face many hardships that can lead to poor health, such as unsafe housing, lack of access to healthy foods, less time for physical activity, less education and more overall stress. Income also has a significant impact on the health and future income of children, and it can affect health across generations.

Employment

Employment provides income and other resources, such as health insurance, that lead to better health^{5,6}. Our jobs can also give us a sense of identity and purpose, as well as social connections. Where we work, and the type of work we do, influences our health. People with lower socioeconomic status

¹ Santa Clara County Public Health report, *Health and Social Equity in Santa Clara County* (2011)

² Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, *Education and Health* (2011)

³ Minnesota Department of Health, *White Paper on Income and Health* (2014)

⁴ Santa Clara County Public Health report, *Health and Social Equity in Santa Clara County* (2011)

⁵ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, *Work, Workplaces and Health* (2015)

⁶ Santa Clara County Public Health report, *Health and Social Equity in Santa Clara County* (2011)

EXAMPLES: CONDITIONS THAT AFFECT HEALTH AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

are more likely to work in jobs with unhealthy and/or unsafe working conditions. Unemployment can also contribute to poor health—and good health is often needed for employment. This creates a bad cycle for people who are unable to work because of illness or disability; without employment, they have fewer resources and opportunities to improve their health.

Housing

Good health depends on having homes that are safe and healthy^{7,8}. A safe and healthy home gives people security, privacy and stability, which can lower their stress. Homeowners often have better health than renters. Lower-income families in poor living conditions are more likely to suffer from serious illnesses – both infectious and chronic – and injuries. Unhealthy and unsafe living conditions can include run-down homes, pest infestations, mold, lead and other toxins in the home and overcrowding. These conditions can negatively affect children’s growth and development. Not having a home is even worse; homelessness has serious impacts on the health and well-being of individuals and families.

Neighborhood Conditions

The neighborhoods we live in have powerful effects on our health and how long we live^{9,10}. A safe and healthy neighborhood provides places for children to play and adults to exercise that are free from crime, violence and pollution. Experiencing nature and green spaces is beneficial to health, and having green spaces in your neighborhood makes them easier to access. Access to grocery stores selling fresh fruits and vegetables makes it easier for people to eat healthful foods. Good public transportation helps people get to their jobs, medical appointments and other places they need to go. Living in a neighborhood with good schools and public services, as well as connections and trust between neighbors, strengthens health. However, not everyone has access to healthy neighborhoods. Housing discrimination over many years has limited the ability of many low-income families, American Indians and people of color to move to healthy neighborhoods. Laws and policies may favor wealthier neighborhoods, leaving lower-income communities struggling with a lack of resources to make their neighborhoods safer and healthier. Many people in rural communities also have difficulty accessing healthy food, medical care, public services and other important resources for health.

Transportation

Transportation is key to all of our daily activities, providing access to jobs, food and health care, as well as connections to family and friends. Having a range of transportation options improves social connectedness, supports mental health and provides access to economic opportunity. Reliable and affordable transportation is important for equity in health. Equitable transportation supports the health of communities by ensuring that everyone can get where they need to go. Older adults, youth and people with disabilities may rely on public transportation, when it is available. Rural populations may

⁷ Santa Clara County Public Health report, *Health and Social Equity in Santa Clara County* (2011)

⁸ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, *Housing and Health* (2011)

⁹ Santa Clara County Public Health report, *Health and Social Equity in Santa Clara County* (2011)

¹⁰ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, *Housing and Health* (2011)

have very limited transportation options. In cities, heavy traffic may cause noise and air pollution, limit opportunities for walking and pose safety hazards.

Access to Health Care

Access to quality health care is important for protecting health^{11,12}. Without access to routine health care, people's health needs are often not met and they may become sicker and end up in the emergency room. People with health insurance are much more likely to have access to health care, including preventive services that can help them avoid chronic disease. Not having insurance is a major barrier to accessing health care. Transportation, language and cost can also be barriers. If people cannot get to medical appointments or have a hard time communicating with health care providers, their access is limited. Even if people have health insurance, it may not cover enough of the costs to make it affordable to access the care they need. Some communities, especially in rural areas, do not have enough doctors and clinics. Disparities in access to health care affect people's quality of life and ability to contribute fully to society.

Racism and Discrimination

Many research studies show that racism leads to worse health for people of color^{13,14,15}. People of color have higher rates of serious health issues than whites, including heart disease, stroke, diabetes, hypertension, certain cancers, respiratory illness and pain-related problems. On average, African Americans, American Indians, Pacific Islanders and some Asian American groups live shorter lives and have worse health outcomes than whites. Because of discrimination and structural racism, people of color are likely to be less wealthy, have less education and live in segregated communities with underfunded schools and public services, poor transportation and housing, and more environmental hazards. But even when people of color have higher incomes and education levels, their health can still be negatively impacted by racism. For example, infant mortality rates among babies born to college-educated African American women are higher than rates among babies born to white women who have not finished high school.

Racism and other forms of discrimination – including discrimination and stigma against people with disabilities, LGBTQ individuals, people who practice certain religions and immigrants – prevent people from accessing opportunities and services. People's health suffers when they experience discrimination from individuals. Even more damaging are institutions and systems that exclude, do not serve or harm some groups of people.

Social Connections and Support

Social connections and support contribute to people's health by giving them the emotional and practical resources they need, such as encouraging words during a difficult time or rides to medical

¹¹ Santa Clara County Public Health report, *Health and Social Equity in Santa Clara County* (2011)

¹² Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, *Healthy People 2020: Access to Health Services*

¹³ World Health Organization, *The Solid Facts* (2003)

¹⁴ Santa Clara County Public Health report, *Health and Social Equity in Santa Clara County* (2011)

¹⁵ California Newsreel, *Unnatural Causes: Backgrounders from the Unnatural Causes Health Equity Database* (2008)

EXAMPLES: CONDITIONS THAT AFFECT HEALTH AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

appointments^{16,17}. Belonging to a social network makes people feel cared for and valued. Supportive relationships can reduce stress and promote healthier behaviors. Social support improves outcomes related to many health conditions, as well as pregnancy outcomes. Social support may be especially important for communities of color because of its role in protecting against the harmful health effects of discrimination.

Social isolation and exclusion, on the other hand, are associated with premature death. People who get less social and emotional support from others are more likely to experience health problems such as depression, pregnancy complications and disability from chronic diseases. Social isolation is a special concern for older adults, people with disabilities and people experiencing stigma related to certain health conditions or related to a certain part of their identity.

¹⁶ World Health Organization, *The Solid Facts* (2003)

¹⁷ Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, [Healthy People 2020: Social Cohesion](#)