

Health and Social Equity in Florence County

Florence County Health Department | 2016 Report

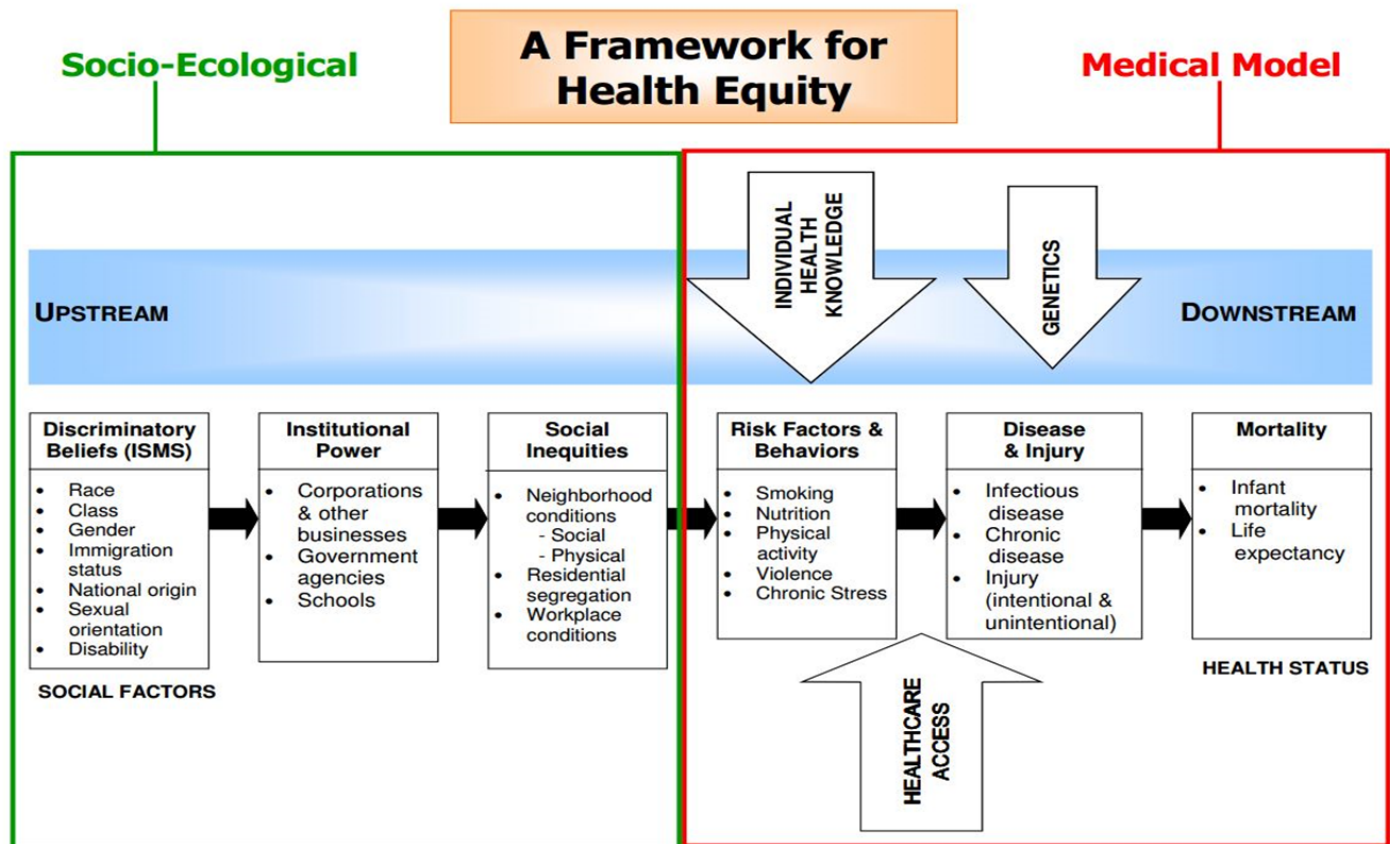
According to the World Health Organization (WHO), **equity** is the absence of avoidable or remediable differences among groups of people, whether those groups are defined socially, economically, demographically, or geographically.

To achieve health equity, we must address broad social inequalities - access to power, resources, and opportunities - all of which contribute to the distribution of health and disease within a population. Florence County Public Health Department is working to achieve health equity through several strategies:

- Transforming our own organization through **institutional change**;
- Working with residents to build community-driven initiatives and building coalitions that **address the root causes** of health inequities;
- Addressing **local, state, and federal policies** that impact social and health inequities;
- Supporting this innovative work with **data and research**; and
- Connecting our **programs and services** to all of these areas.

Our “work” is also guided by our Framework for Achieving Health Equity, adapted from the San Francisco, California-based Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative (BARHII).

Framework for Achieving Health Equity



-Adapted by Alameda County Public Health Department from the Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative, Summer 2008

Social Determinants of Health in Florence County

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), **social determinants of health** are the conditions in which people are born, learn, grow, live, work, and age. These conditions affect a wide range of health issues, outcomes, and risk factors, which are in turn shaped by a wider set of forces that include economics, social policies, and politics.

Achieving health equity involves identifying, analyzing and working to overcome factors that contribute to the differences in population health outcomes.

Social Determinant	Florence County	Wisconsin
Overall Poverty Rate	13%	13%
Children in Poverty	20%	18%
Single-parent household	33%	31%
Uninsured	14%	11%
Some College	62%	67%

Source: 2015 County Health Rankings.

Studies have shown that health disparities result from multiple social determinants. We have identified the top five of most concern to our community.

Poverty

While there are jobs available both in the county and across the border in Iron Mountain, most offer fairly low wages, resulting in a large proportion of families at or near poverty level. While our overall poverty rate is the same as Wisconsin at 13% and slightly higher than the state average for children, this is an important factor in Florence County. Studies have linked poverty to poorer health outcomes.

Lack of Transportation

Rural areas create geographical barriers for community members; especially those with low income. Frequently, our residents need to travel 20 miles or more to obtain healthcare. Florence County lacks public transportation infrastructure such as buses, trains, subway, or even taxis. This can be hardship for families who don't have access to a reliable vehicle or are challenged by high fuel prices.

Inequalities in Education

According to studies referenced on the CDC website, individuals with less education are more likely to experience a number of health risks, such as obesity, substance abuse, and intentional and unintentional injury, compared with individuals with more education. Higher levels of education are associated with a longer life and an increased likelihood of obtaining or understanding basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions. In our county, the percentage of people obtaining college education is 5% below the state average. (See chart above)

Inadequate Access to Care

The population is underserved in healthcare and mental health care professionals. We are a Designated Medically Underserved Area/Population. Florence County primary care physician rate is 1510 to one versus the state average of 1220 residents per physician. There are no mental health providers in our county yet the Wisconsin average is 590 residents to every 1 mental health provider.

Aging Population

Florence County has a significantly higher population age 18 years and older than the state and the nation. The trend of increasing baby boomers, with a decline in industry has led to decline in the 18 and under population. The median age of a Florence County resident, as reported by City-Data.com, is 49.0 years of age.

Significant Health Disparities in Florence County

Health Disparities

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) defines health disparities as “preventable differences in the burden of disease, injury, violence, or opportunities to achieve optimal health that are experienced by socially disadvantaged populations. Health disparities are inequitable and are directly related to the historical and current unequal distribution of social, political, economic, and environmental resources”. These factors influence rates of chronic disease such as diabetes, arthritis, cancer and heart disease

Disparity	Florence County	Wisconsin
Adult obesity	34%	29%
Physical inactivity	25%	22%
Diabetes prevalence	12%	9%
Access to exercise opportunity	45%	81%

Source: 2015 County Health Rankings.

The County Health Rankings indicate that Florence County residents lack access to exercise opportunities mostly because popular outdoor activities in such as snowmobiling, hunting, using all-terrain vehicles and fishing don’t afford a high level of cardiovascular or strengthening benefits.

Strategies to Address Health Disparities in Florence County

Community Garden

One community partnership achievement has been the Community garden on Woodward Avenue. Community gardens are an evidence-based strategy to increase fresh food access. The garden began in 2013 when there was no full service grocery store in Florence County. The project has been a collaboration of many community partnerships. Since its establishment, it was used as a model to create school gardens further addressing health equities.

Strong Bones and Walk with Ease Programs

Two new initiatives to address physical inactivity and combat chronic disease are the Walk with Ease and Strong Bones program which are being offered in partnership with the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) and University of Wisconsin Extension (UWEX) at the Florence County Library and Wild Rivers Interpretive Center. The program, location and materials were developed with input from community members and target audiences at the ADRC meal sites and Chapin Heights through surveys and focus groups.

Transportation Advocacy

Currently, transportation to medical appointments can be reimbursed through Medical Transportation Management available through the state via several county agencies including ADRC and Human Services Department. We are advocating for expansion of the program to reimburse rural participants in public clinic immunizations at satellite, rural sites and the Women, Infants and Children program which provides high quality nutritional counseling.

We will continue to identify and implement strategies to address factors that contribute to specific populations’ higher health risks and poorer health outcomes. Addressing health equity is unique to each population but ultimately creates a higher level of health for the entire community.

To learn more about health equity:

Unnatural Causes - A seven-part documentary film series exploring racial and socioeconomic inequalities in health.
<http://www.unnaturalcauses.org/>

CDC Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion website.
<https://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/healthequity/>

World Health Organization Health Systems topics
<http://www.who.int/healthsystems/topics/equity/en/>

San Francisco State University Health Equity Institute
<http://healthequity.sfsu.edu/content/defining-health-equity>