**SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH**

Adapted from Unnatural Causes lesson plans.[[1]](#endnote-1)

In this module we will be examining Vital Signs data to understand the effect of social determinants on health outcomes across neighborhoods in Baltimore City. You will then answer the seven questions in the Assignment section.

**Introduction**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention define social determinants of health as:

“The complex, integrated, and overlapping social structures and economic systems that are responsible for most health inequities. These social structures and economic systems include the social environment, physical environment, health services, and structural and societal factors. Social determinants of health are shaped by the distribution of money, power, and resources throughout local communities, nations, and the world”.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Below are some major dimensions of social determinants of health:

* **Physical and Built Environment**- Presence and quality of features of space and geography that determine access to health benefits or exposure to health risks.[[3]](#endnote-3) (Ex. quality of housing stock, access to supermarkets, walkability, traffic, pollution)
* **Social Environment-** The presence or absence of interpersonal relationships, groups, and networks that provide support, solidarity, partnership, and sense of belonging for residents.[[4]](#endnote-4) (Ex. crime, degree of racial integration or segregation, views on local government, community engagement)
* **Economic Environment-** The presence or absence of commercial investment and businesses that provide residents with adequate income (employment, tax base) and health-promoting goods and services (produce, banking).[[5]](#endnote-5)
* **Service Environment-** The presence or absence of adequate schools, police and fire protection, water and sewer systems, healthcare facilities, mass transit, and other services that allow residents to live healthy, safe, productive lives.[[6]](#endnote-6)

Given the strong influence of these determinants on health, differences in these determinants can result in marked health disparities between communities. Let’s examine how social determinants of health play out at the neighborhood level in Baltimore City.

**Step 1:** Brainstorm [Vital Signs indicators](http://bniajfi.org/vital_signs/) that could measure each of the dimensions identified above. Identify 3-4 indicators for each dimension. For each indicator, briefly discuss what aspect of the dimension you are hoping to measure and the strengths and weaknesses of using these indicators as measurements.

**Step 2:** Open up the Excel Workbook titled “Social Determinants”, and look at the worksheet titled Raw Data. You will see that there are indicators given for the four dimensions of social determinants. Discuss how these are similar or different from the indicators you chose in Step 1. Then select three indicators for each dimension that you think will have an effect of health outcomes.

**Step 3:** Now click on the “DataTable” worksheet in the same Workbook. Here you will find interactive tables with drop-down lists where you can select the three determinants for each dimension that you chose in Step 2. If you need to look at the definitions for each indicator, click on the worksheet titled “Indicator Definitions”. Go ahead and select the three determinants for each dimension. Now select a Community Statistical Area (CSA) from the drop-down list in cell A4.

**Step 4:** Compare each of the indicators for your CSA to the average given for Baltimore City. For each of these indicators for your CSA, discuss whether having a higher or lower number than Baltimore would positively or negatively affect health outcomes.

**Step 5:** You will now fill out the table titled “Rankings”.To do so, use the information from Step 4 to rank each indicator as follows: “1-Harmful to health, 2-needs improvement, or 3-health protective”. After you fill in the table, compare the charts titled “Health Outcomes” and “Rankings”.

**Assignment:**

1. How do the social determinants of health indicators relate to the health outcomes you identified?
2. Did you predict the health outcomes given the table of social determinants of health you identified?
3. Would you say this is a healthy neighborhood?
4. What seem to be some of the biggest problems residents face?
5. What are some of the best assets they have?
6. How accurate or comprehensive do you think your data are?
7. How can this information be used to inform policies and programs to improve health in this community?

Another source of health outcomes is the [Baltimore City Health Department Neighborhood Health Profiles](http://health.baltimorecity.gov/neighborhood-health-profiles)

1. Unnatural Causes Website. “Place Matters: Exploring Our Neighborhoods.” Lesson Plan developed by Manon Parry for California Newsreel. Accessed August 1, 2014 from <http://www.unnaturalcauses.org/for_educators.php>. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website. “Social Determinants of Health.” Accessed August 1, 2014 from <http://www.cdc.gov/socialdeterminants/Definitions.html> Updated March 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Unnatural Causes website. “Place Matters: Exploring Our Neighborhoods.” Lesson Plan developed by Manon Parry for California Newsreel. Accessed August 1, 2014 from <http://www.unnaturalcauses.org/for_educators.php>. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)