

Analysis of social determinants of health and health inequities
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Abstracts of key-note lectures

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Action on Social Determinants of Health

The WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health (CSDH) was tasked with collecting and synthesizing global evidence on the social determinants of health and their impact on health inequity and to make recommendations for action to address that inequity. The CSDH argued that for reasons of social justice, action to achieve health equity is imperative. Health inequity between and within countries are related to levels of social disadvantage and inequality; they are not inevitable. The CSDH outlined how government policies, governance and social and economic forces shape health, even in more developed countries.

Tackling health inequities requires action across social, political and economic domains. The evidence to support this approach was documented in the CSDH Report. With few exceptions the evidence shows that the lower an individual's socioeconomic position the worse their health. Attempts to reduce health inequity must therefore be predicated on addressing gradients in the wider social and economic determinants, such as levels of education, economic status, work and power relations.

A number of countries and regions are developing whole of government strategies to improve health and reduce health inequities. Reducing health inequalities has been a focus of government policy in the UK for a number of years. Following the report of the CSDH, the Department of Health for England and Wales commissioned the Strategic Review of Health Inequalities Post 2010 (Marmot Review), chaired by Michael Marmot, to report back its findings and advise on strategies in early 2009.

In order to monitor and assess performance improvement in achieving health equity through the social determinants, the Marmot Review has been working to identify a framework for establishing potential targets and indicators of outcome, output and process to underpin the areas of action that have emerged from the Review, underpinned by the CSDH conceptual framework. Based on this conceptual approach, the Marmot Review has examined the types of indicators that might be appropriate for monitoring process, outputs and outcomes in reducing the gradient.