



The Life Course Framework: A New Approach to MCH

*“A **Healthy Community** is one that is continually creating and improving those physical and social environments and expanding those community resources that enable people to mutually support each other in performing all the functions of life and in developing to their maximum potential.”*
World Health Organization

**Relationships and partnerships are key to healthy communities.
No one agency can do it all. It takes a community.**

Why We Need a New Approach

- We spend more on healthcare but get less.
- Our system of care is fragmented at best.
- Our financing system favors treating preventable disease rather than preventing diseases in the first place.
- We need to take health promotion beyond clinical care.
- Health and opportunities for health begin where we live, learn, work and play.
- We need to address social-economic-environmental inequities that lead to health inequities.

MCH Goals

- To optimize health across the lifespan, for all people
- To eliminate health disparities across populations and communities

Key Life Course Concepts

- **Today’s experiences and exposures influence tomorrow’s health (Timeline).**
- **Health pathways are particularly affected during critical or sensitive periods. (Timing)**
 - Earliest experiences and exposures during critical or sensitive periods throughout life are important in shaping the health of individuals and populations.
- **The broader community environment strongly affects the capacity to be healthy. (Environment)**
 - Environment is broadly defined to include not only physical factors such as safe housing, areas for recreation, availability of nutritious foods, clean air and water, etc. but also social and economic factors such as racism, poverty status of families and communities, job opportunities, community or family violence, external stress, etc. and the capacity of the community to engage in change.
- **Inequality in health reflects more than genetics and personal choice. (Equity)**
 - Marked and persistent difference in health across populations and communities cannot be explained solely in terms of genetic make-up or individual choices, but rather reflect the impact of broader societal and environmental conditions over time. Disparities in the life circumstance of population groups within our society (poor vs. rich; Black vs. White vs. Hispanic vs. Asian vs. Native American; immigrant vs. U.S. born – etc.) lead to disparities in health across these same groups.

- **The interplay of risk and protective factors influence health.**
 - Exposures to risk and protective factors occur throughout the life course (Timeline), have a significant impact on health if they occur during critical or sensitive periods (Timing), and occur within the context of the broader community environment (Environment). Differential exposures to risk and protective factors contribute to disparities in health outcomes. (Equity).

Risk Factors	Protective Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Insecurity • Homelessness • Living in Poverty • Unsafe Neighborhoods • Domestic Violence • Environmental Pollution • Inadequate Education Opportunities • Racial Discrimination • Low Birthweight • Lack of Access to Quality Health Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nurturing Family • Safe Neighborhoods • Strong and Positive Relationships • Economic Security • Access to High Quality Schools and Early Care and Education • Access to Quality Primary Care and Other Health Services

Goals for the 2012 MCH Objectives

- **The Wisconsin Healthiest Families Initiative strives to assure all families have access to a coordinated, integrated and sustainable system of services and supports focused on health promotion and prevention.**
 - Focus areas include family supports, child development, mental health and/or safety and injury prevention.
- **The Keeping Kids Alive Initiative strives to establish a sustainable, coordinated system to identify causes of all fetal, infant, and child deaths, resulting in preventive strategies for community action.**

Linking the MCH Objectives/Goals and Life Course Framework

- **The MCH Objectives and Goals focus on early childhood because it is a *critical, sensitive period with life-long impacts on health.***
- **The MCH Objectives and Goals support plans for community systems that can *build on protective factors and reduce risk factors* for young children and families.**
- **The MCH Objectives and Goals involve collaborations with community partners because the *broader community environment strongly affects the capacity to be healthy.***