

Public health

The science and art of promoting health, preventing disease, and prolonging life through the organized efforts of society. Reference: adapted from the "Acheson Report", London, 1988

Public health is a social and political concept aimed at the improving health, prolonging life and improving the quality of life among whole populations through health promotion, disease prevention and other forms of health intervention. A distinction has been made in the health promotion literature between public health and a new public health for the purposes of emphasizing significantly different approaches to the description and analysis of the determinants of health, and the methods of solving public health problems. This new public health is distinguished by its basis in a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which lifestyles and living conditions determine health status, and a recognition of the need to mobilize resources and make sound investments in policies, programmes and services which create, maintain and protect health by supporting healthy lifestyles and creating supportive environments for health. Such a distinction between the "old" and the "new" may not be necessary in the future as the mainstream concept of public health develops and expands. The concept of ecological public health has also emerged in the literature. It has evolved in response to the changing nature of health issues and their interface with emerging global environmental problems. These new problems include global ecological risks such as the destruction of the ozone layer, uncontrolled and unmanageable air and water pollution, and global warming. These developments have a substantial impact on health which often eludes simple models of causality and intervention. Ecological public health emphasises the common ground between achieving health and sustainable development. It focuses on the economic and environmental determinants of health, and on the means by which economic investment should be guided towards producing the best population health outcomes, greater equity in health, and sustainable use of resource.

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