



A NEW MODEL OF HEALTH

Building power for health and equity

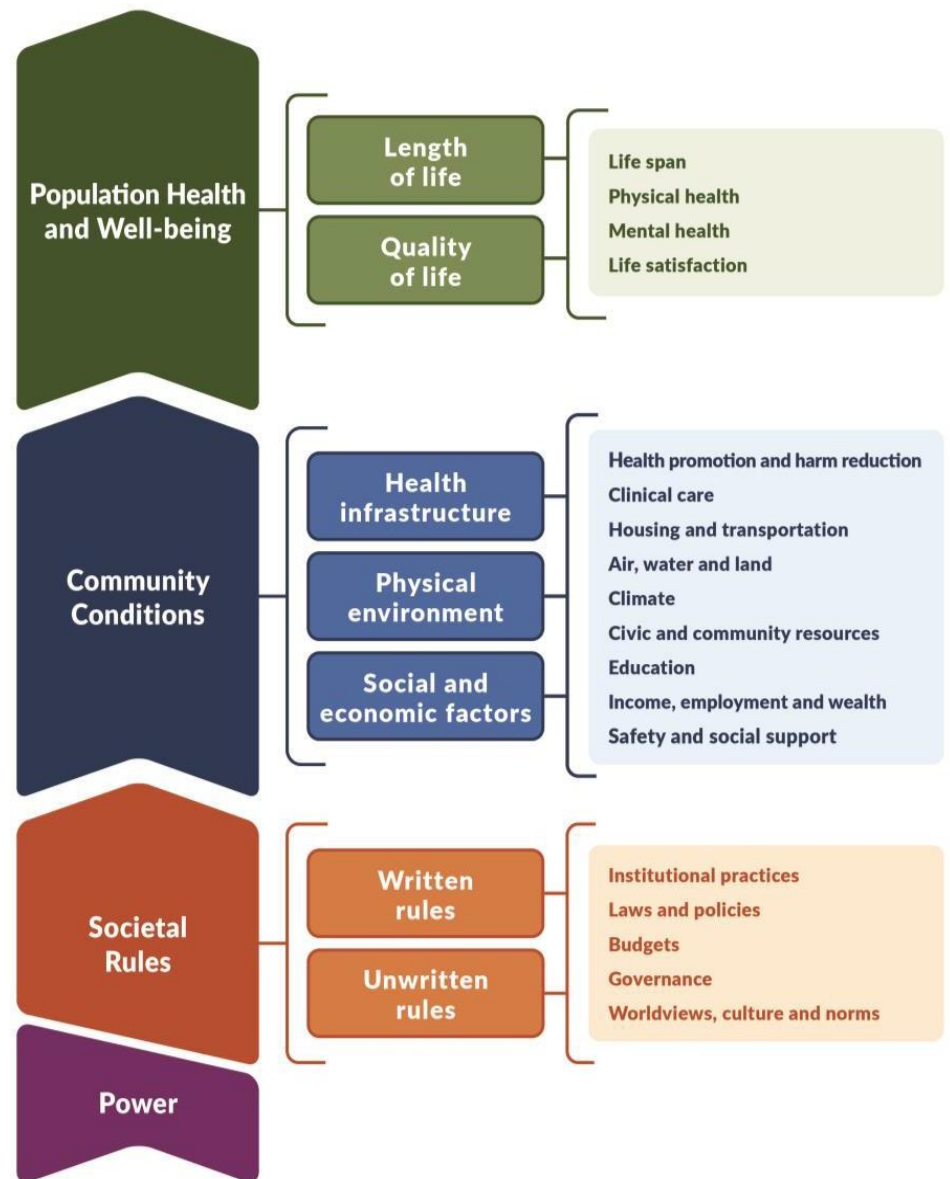
Deepening our understanding of what shapes health

The University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute (UWPHI) Model of Health shows how community conditions — where we live, learn, work and play — affect our collective health and well-being.

These conditions are the result of how power is applied and reinforced through society's rules, including laws and policies that determine which communities have the resources needed to thrive.

The new model of health builds on more than two decades of scholarship. It broadens our view of health by examining how conditions like income, safe housing and well-resourced schools come about. And it asks important questions, such as:

- How are those with power using policies, laws and budgets to hold conditions in place?
- Who shaped those conditions? And, why?
- How can we address root causes of health inequities?



University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute Model of Health © 2025

Key takeaways:

- The conditions necessary for healthy, thriving communities **don't happen by chance**; those in power created and maintained them.
- There is a way forward; **everyone can build power** to improve conditions so that everyone has what they need to live long and live well.



For more information on
the model and additional
resources, visit:
countyhealthrankings.org

Using the new model

How do I use the new model?

The new model calls on us to more closely examine how the conditions needed for good health come to be. Use the model to broaden your view of how health is produced. You can dig into data and evidence-informed strategies to understand and improve the health of your community.

What are the primary components of the model?

The model is made up of power, societal rules, community conditions and population health and well-being. Safe housing, jobs that pay a living wage and well-resourced schools are among the factors, often called the social determinants of health, which make up a healthy community. How these conditions are created, distributed and maintained determines the opportunity for everyone to thrive. Society's rules, policies and laws, leveraged by people in power, shape community conditions. Rules may be written in the form of policies and laws, or unwritten, in the form of worldviews, culture and norms. Together, they make up the structural determinants of health.

How is the new model of health different from the last model?

The new model broadens our understanding of the factors that shape health. It reflects the latest evidence and theory and explores a layer beyond social determinants to help us understand how community conditions came about. It builds out conditions by adding concepts such as climate, which has emerged as having a clear connection to health. It shows that the conditions don't happen by chance; they are the result of things like laws and budgets set and held by people in power that shape how well and how long we live.

What role does power play in health?

Power – who grows and wields it – and how it is applied through written and unwritten rules shapes community conditions, and in turn our health and well-being. When power is concentrated, those in power can use it to advantage their interests and disadvantage interests aligned with good health for all. When we grow the power of those most burdened, we can cultivate communities where everyone has the opportunity for good health.

How can we use the model to respond to current political challenges?

Power is being contested all around us, whether that comes in the form of restructuring the rules we live by, challenging worldviews and norms around science, or defunding services and programs essential for communities to thrive. The model can help unpack and understand changes and challenges in public health. At the same time, we can use scientific expertise and build power to advance health and equity.

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