

09-09

STATEMENT OF POLICY

Support for and Implementation of the Recommendations of the World Health Organization Commission on Social Determinants of Health Report: *Closing the Gap in a Generation: Health Equity through Action on the Social Determinants of Health*

Policy

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) supports the recommendations of the World Health Organization Commission on Social Determinants of Health report *Closing the Gap in a Generation: Health Equity through Action on the Social Determinants of Health* and their implementation.¹

Justification

Inequities in the distribution of disease, illness, and death continue to increase and pose a threat to the nation.² Since the time of Rudolph Virchow, a founder of social medicine in the 1840s, the social, political, and economic origins of illness have been well documented and undeniable.³ A strong evidence base indicates that social and economic inequality and an embedded structure of inequality, based on racism, class structure, and gender discrimination negatively influence health outcomes and life chances.⁴ An important vehicle and opportunity for organizing and engaging others to act on the root causes of health inequity is the recommendations of the 2008 Report of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health of the World Health Organization, *Closing the Gap in a Generation*. The report provides a comprehensive marshalling of evidence “on what can be done to promote health equity and to foster a global movement to achieve it.” Their focus, as does NACCHO’s, explores the role of the economic and political system in producing health inequity, based on “a holistic view of social determinants of health.”⁵ Core recommendations include (1) improving daily living conditions; (2) tackling the inequitable distribution of power, money, and resources; and (3) measuring and understanding the problem and assessing the impact of action. By basing a campaign on this highly respected report that provides the grounds for action and specific action steps, NACCHO will be able to build momentum for change on all levels in seeking to eliminate health inequities.

Record of Action

*Approved by NACCHO Board of Directors
November 2009*

References

1. Geneva, 2008.

2. See for example, Joannes Siegrist and Michael Marmot eds., *Social Inequalities in Health: New Evidence and Policy Implications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). See also, Paula Braveman, Nancy Krieger, and James Lynch. “Health Inequalities and Social Inequalities in Health” 78(2) *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* (2000): 232-234; David Williams, James Y. Nazroo, “The Structuring of Ethnic Inequalities: Economic Position, Racial Discrimination, and Racism” 93(2) *American Journal of Public Health* (February, 2003): 277-84; Graham, Hilary. *Unequal Lives: Health and Socioeconomic Inequalities*. Berkshire, UK: Open



University Press, 2007; Krieger, Nancy, D.H. Rehkopf, J.T. Chen, P.D. Waterman, E. Marcelli, et al. "The Fall and Rise of U.S. Inequities in Premature Mortality 1960-2002." *PLoS Medicine* 5 (2): e46 doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.0050046.

3. Christopher Hamlin *Public Health and Social Justice in the Age of Chadwick* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); G. Rosen, *A History of Public Health* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Dorothy Porter, *Health, Civilization, and the State A History of Public Health from Ancient to Modern Times* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

4. G. A. Kaplan, et al., "Income Inequality and Mortality in the United States: Analysis of Mortality and Potential Pathways" 312 *British Medical Journal* (1996): 999-1003; Lynch and Smith, 2000; John W. Lynch, et al., "Income Inequality and Mortality: Importance to Health of Individual Income, Psychosocial Environment, or Material Conditions" 320 *British Medical Journal* (April 29, 2000); Jo Phelan and Bruce G. Link, "Social Conditions as Fundamental Causes of Disease" *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* (1995): 80-94.

5. Note 1.