

Induction session: What is research on the wider determinants of health?

Purpose of this resource:

- This is an induction session for public and community contributors that can be adapted for your organisation.
- It can be delivered online or in person.
- A slide deck is available to support the session.

Session plan

- The following plan is for a 1 hour session.

Session aims:

1. To introduce the wider determinants of health and the impact they have on our individual health
2. To explain that we can respond to health inequalities with prevention, promotion and protection
3. To introduce why we need research on the wider determinants of health.
4. To explore how public contributors play an essential role in shaping the research that matters most to local communities

Timing	Topic	Activity	Key messages
5 mins	Session Introduction	Presentation	Introduce the session and learning objectives. By the end of this session, you will be able to: - Identify the wider determinants of health and their contribution to our health - Explain how public health responds to health challenges through prevention, promotion and protection. - Explain why research is important to public health - Start to consider public health challenges in your area
15 mins	What goes into your health?	Warmer activity/poll Presentation	Ask participants to quickly write what they think are the key things that contribute to your health. OR Ask participants to vote in a poll 'What percentage of our health is determined by health services?' Slide 3

			• Lots of different factors contribute to our health • Modelling suggests that 20% is determined by health services • 80% of our health is influenced by socioeconomic factors, the physical environment and health behaviours. These are the wider determinants of health.
	Wider determinants of health		In 1991, Dahlgren and Whitehead created this model to describe all the different things that influenced our health. The outer layer is the wider determinants or 'building blocks' of health. These include: - The education we have had access to - Our working conditions and whether we are employed or unemployed - Housing and our living conditions, including green and blue spaces - The access we have to food and water - The access we have to health care services These influence our health and wellbeing in many ways. They determine our opportunities to do the things that will help us to stay well as individuals – such as eating a healthy diet and being physically active – as well as determining our ability to access health services when we need them. Source: The Dahlgren-Whitehead model of health determinants: 30 years on and still chasing rainbows Slide 5 Research shows how one determinant can impact on others and have implications throughout our lives. Here you can see that children from low-income families are more likely to leave school early. This can mean that they end up in lower paying jobs and have poorer health outcomes. It can also mean they have fewer qualifications, which has been linked to smoking, obesity and chronic illness.

	Public health	Presentation	Public health is the science and art that responds to these challenges. It looks at broader factors like environment, policies, and community-wide interventions and works to improve the health of populations through: • Health Protection (safeguarding populations from health threats and hazards e.g. vaccines, emergency response etc.). • Health Improvement (creating environments that support individuals to make healthy lifestyle choices and addressing health inequalities) Ultimately, public health wants to increase life expectancy and years lived in good health and close the gap between the most and least deprived. Currently, people in some parts of the UK have a life expectancy which is ten years less than wealthier areas of the UK. Source: Public Health Outcomes Framework: commentary. May 2025 - GOV.UK
10 mins	Why do we need research on the wider determinants?	Video Presentation	Where does research sit in this picture and why do we need it? Especially in a local authority setting? Play introductory video on ‘what is research?’ Research on the wider determinants of health can provide evidence to inform the design of policies, interventions and allocate resources appropriately. It can help decision makers make more informed decisions. By building a better understanding of the risk factors for certain groups and what works in response can lead to a better use of public money and better outcomes for residents. Research can play an important part in the design and evaluation of services and activities to improve public health:

			- During the 'analyse' stage, research can help to establish who is most affected by an issue and the challenges they face. It can also help identify what responses might be most appropriate. - Evaluation can identify what difference the activity or service has made and how it can be improved. Some examples of public health research are: • Understanding vaccine hesitancy • Evaluating community health programmes • Designing culturally appropriate health messages • Studying quality of air pollution on asthma in children • Exploring barriers/enablers to accessing care • And much more.... Local authorities draw on lots of different types of knowledge and evidence. You can see a number of examples in this table. Knowledge is information and understanding gained through experience, education, observation, and research. Evidence is data or information that supports a conclusion, hypothesis or decisions in public health policy and practice. It can come from many sources, including studies Evidence is often external, documented, and generalisable; Knowledge is often internal, contextual, and personal. Both are essential. Evidence tells us what works, and knowledge tells us what matters.
25 minutes	Identifying local challenges	Group discussion	Public and community contributors play an essential role in shaping the research that matters most to local communities. Invite session participants to discuss in small groups: - What do you think are the biggest challenges facing local communities in this area?

			- How are these challenges impacting on health? - What research could help identify solutions/ how to respond or help us to better understand these challenges and who is affected the most? Invite each group to feedback any important points from their discussion. <i>Note: we suggest you provide some fingertips data from your local area or further background information to support this discussion, drawn from your local Joint Strategic Needs Assessment or Health and Wellbeing Strategy.</i>
5 minutes	Q&A and session close	Group plenary	Revisit learning objectives. Ask participants if they have any questions at this stage. Signpost to opportunities for further learning and support – you may wish to share resources available from the NIHR RSS Specialist Centre for Public Health.