

# CLOSING THE GAP: POLICY INTO PRACTICE ON SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

| DISCUSSION PAPER |



All for Equity

## World Conference on Social Determinants of Health

RIO DE JANEIRO | BRAZIL | 19–21 OCTOBER 2011



World Health  
Organization



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# FOREWORD

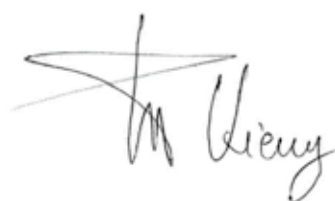
In the time it takes to read this discussion paper, hundreds of people will die needlessly as a result of health inequities – unfair and avoidable or remediable differences in health outcomes between different population groups. Health inequities cause unnecessary suffering and result from adverse social conditions and failing public policies. These inequities are sentinels of the same factors that undermine development, environmental sustainability, the well-being of societies, and societies' capacity to provide fair opportunities for all. Health inequities are a problem for all countries and reflect not only differences in income and wealth, but also differences in opportunity on the basis of factors such as ethnicity and racism, class, gender, education, disability, sexual orientation, and geographical location. These differences have profound consequences and represent the impact of what we know as social determinants of health.

Yet health inequities, by definition, are not inevitable. Millions of people need not die of preventable causes each year. In 2008, the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health compiled recommendations to create an extensive prescription of what is required to “close the gap” through action on social determinants across all sectors of society. After considering the Commission's report at the 2009 World Health Assembly, Member States resolved to put these recommendations into practice, adopting Resolution 62.14, “Reducing health inequities through action on the social determinants of health.”

Accordingly, many countries are implementing action on social determinants, with encouraging progress in reducing health inequities in a few cases. In recent years, many countries have taken important steps in moving towards universal coverage of health care. There is improved understanding of the contribution of health to other goals such as social cohesion and economic development, along with the need to coordinate the efforts of different sectors in improving health. More countries are disaggregating data to uncover health inequities masked by national averages. There is, however, a

need to build upon and accelerate these efforts. Since the launch of the Commission's report in 2008, the world has faced a number of crises that have exacerbated global health inequities. Therefore, it is urgent that we — in governments, in civil society, in the private sector, and in international organizations — redouble our efforts to act on social determinants to address health inequities.

In this context, the World Conference on Social Determinants of Health represents a tremendous opportunity. This discussion paper aims to inform the proceedings and contribute to fulfilling the purpose of the World Conference, as mandated by Resolution 62.14: to share experiences on how to address the challenges posed by health inequities and to mobilize commitment to the urgent implementation of feasible actions on social determinants in all countries. The paper does not provide a blueprint, but instead lays out the key components that all countries need to integrate in their own context in implementing a social determinants approach. The discussions at the World Conference will further consider these themes and show how, in all contexts, it is possible to put policy into practice on social determinants of health to improve health, reduce health inequities, and promote development.



*Dr Marie-Paule Kieny*

Assistant Director-General  
Innovation, Information, Evidence  
and Research  
World Health Organization



# ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
Commission	Commission on Social Determinants of Health
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
HIA	Health Impact Assessment
HiAP	Health in All Policies
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISA	Intersectoral Action
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
NCDs	Noncommunicable Diseases
NZDep	New Zealand Deprivation Index
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
Social determinants	Social Determinants of Health
SPF-I	Social Protection Floor Initiative
UHC	Universal Health Coverage
UN	United Nations
UNASUR	Union of South American Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

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