

# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FOR HEALTH

**Community development for health is a framework developed by the Healthy Communities Foundation Australia (the Foundation) to guide our work in supporting communities to improve local health and well-being.**

The Foundation wants to see strong, resilient communities where everyone has good health and wellbeing - places where people look out for each other and have community pride in where they live.

We want to see a reduction in health inequity, which means addressing all the social and economic factors that influence health and wellbeing in partnership with communities and other stakeholders such as government, local councils, Aboriginal organisations, NGOs and private businesses.

Community development for health "is about strengthening and bringing about change in communities. It consists of a set of methods which can broaden vision and capacity for social change, informed by certain principles which seeks to encourage communities - people who live in the same areas or who have something else in common - to tackle for themselves the problems which they face and identify to be important, and which aims to empower them to change things by developing their own skills, knowledge and experience, and by working in partnerships with other groups". (UK Department of Health Social Services & Public Safety, 2002).

Community is the web of personal relationships, groups, networks, organisations, traditions and patterns of behaviour that exist amongst those who share physical neighbourhoods, socio-economic conditions or common understandings and interests.

Community development is a practice which assists the process of people acting together to improve their shared conditions, both through their own efforts and through negotiation with public services. Public service agencies, in turn, seek dialogue and cooperation with users in communities. This is generally called community engagement. So community development, working from the bottom up, links with community engagement, from the top down.

Community development for health focuses on people - their needs and strengths - and aims for better health and wellbeing. It works primarily by bringing people together in groups around a common interest or concern, strengthening the capacity of groups which already exist.



This requires skilled community development facilitators who are independent of government to build community trust, and who work to enable communities and groups to lead their own planning.

As an organisation, the Foundation does not see its role as solving problems for communities, but helping communities solve problems themselves.

Community development has a strong contribution to make to achieving health and wellbeing outcomes.

All constructive community activity is health-giving in itself, either physically or mentally, or both. Some of the activity, by influencing or collaborating with communities and government, can also have the further effect of helping to drive improvements in local conditions, service access or the design of services. The benefit in disadvantaged areas is particularly concentrated since these are often also the areas with greatest health needs.

Improvements have multiple value: they reduce health inequalities and alleviate pressure on the health and social care budget.

The kinds of health and social care issues which can be improved by better community leadership include depression; isolation; falls amongst elderly people; child protection; teenage pregnancy; childhood asthma; postnatal depression; smoking; excessive alcohol consumption; educational attainment etc.

However, the effects may be indirect. Community development produces multiple health benefits precisely because it fosters the interconnections of

all issues affecting a community. It therefore needs to be given the space to work with whatever issues emerge from dialogue with communities.

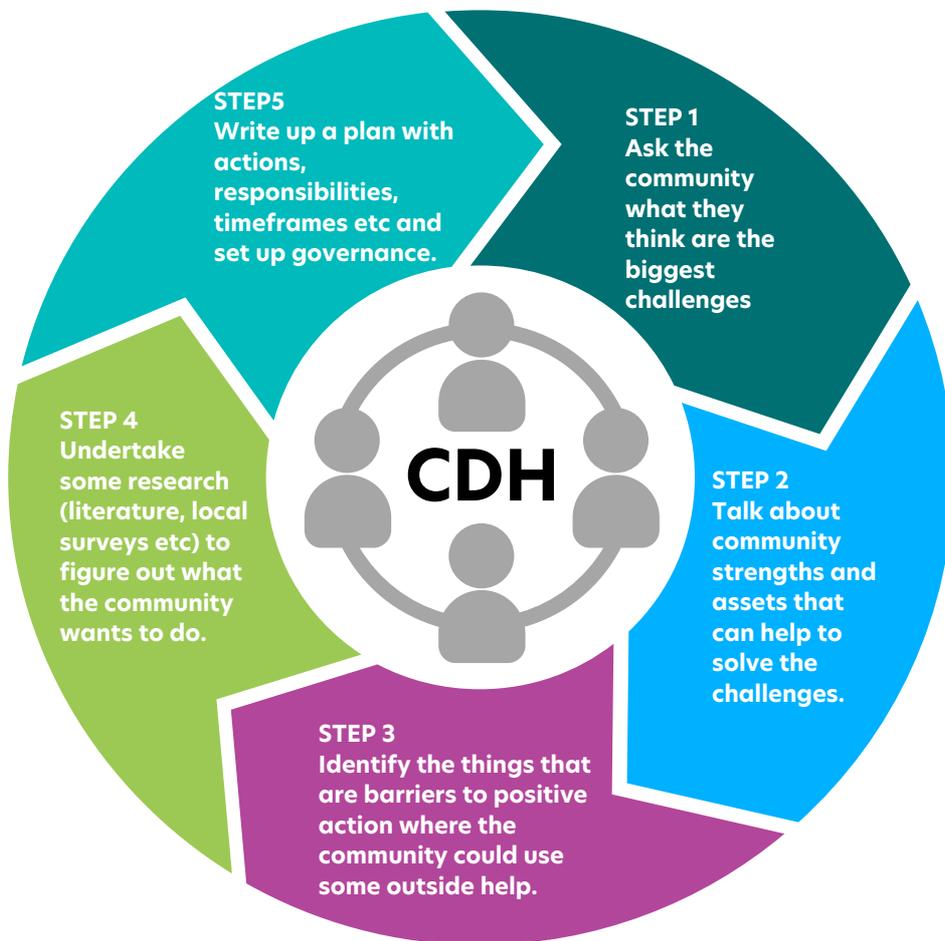
A community development for health approach is underpinned by a more wide ranging view of the social determinants of health and the role of place-based conditions in influencing well-being both positively and negatively. Community development recognises the power of communities owning and solving problems. It requires public agencies, NGOs and other stakeholders to step back and acknowledge that no one organisation can address disadvantage alone, and in many cases public agencies must cede greater control over the design and delivery of programs to communities themselves.

A fundamental element of an effective community development strategy is to include meaningful co-operation with public agencies and with large and small communities (geographic and communities of interest) and with their groups and NGO sector organisations. This will enable the targeting of services to be tailored to the unique needs of specific communities and, in particular, excluded groups.

With better health and well-being comes better ability for children to learn, with better community interaction come safer communities, and front-line staff of public agencies find their jobs easier when communities take greater ownership of their issues, conditions and greater care of themselves and each other.



# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FOR HEALTH FRAMEWORK



**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FOR HEALTH**

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