



Public Health Association
of New Zealand
**Kāhui Hauora Tūmatanui
o Aotearoa**

Think Piece - Commercial Determinants of Health Explained

The determinants of health are the range of factors that influence the health and well-being of individuals and populations. While many are familiar with the traditional determinants such as socioeconomic status, education, and healthcare access, there is another significant set of factors that shape health outcomes: the commercial determinants of health. In this blog, we will explore what the commercial determinants of health are and how they impact our well-being.

Defining the Commercial Determinants of Health

The commercial determinants of health refer to the actions and practices of commercial entities, such as industries and businesses, that have an influence on health outcomes. These determinants operate through various mechanisms, including the production, marketing, and distribution of goods and services, as well as through their impact on policy-making processes. The commercial determinants of health encompass a wide range of industries, including tobacco, alcohol, food and beverages, pharmaceuticals, and advertising.

Understanding Their Impact

Product Availability and Accessibility

The commercial determinants of health can significantly impact the availability and accessibility of goods and services that affect health outcomes. For instance, the availability of unhealthy food options, high-sugar beverages, and tobacco products in communities can contribute to poor dietary choices, obesity, and tobacco-related illnesses. Similarly, limited access to affordable and essential medications or healthcare services due to pricing practices can negatively impact health outcomes.

Marketing and Advertising Practices

Marketing and advertising play a central role in shaping consumer behavior and preferences. The commercial determinants of health heavily rely on marketing strategies to promote products and influence consumer choices. Aggressive marketing tactics employed by industries, particularly towards vulnerable populations like children and adolescents, can lead to the consumption of unhealthy products and contribute to the burden of non-communicable diseases. These marketing practices often prioritize profit over public health considerations.

Policy Influence

Powerful commercial entities have the potential to influence policy-making processes and regulations related to public health. Their lobbying efforts, financial contributions, and industry-funded research can shape policy decisions and hinder public health interventions. For example, tobacco companies have historically utilized their influence to impede tobacco control policies, delaying or diluting their implementation. Understanding the impact of industry influence on policy-making is essential for ensuring evidence-based and effective public health strategies.

Socioeconomic Inequalities

The commercial determinants of health are closely linked to socioeconomic factors and can exacerbate existing health inequalities. Commercial activities often target vulnerable populations, such as low-income communities, contributing to health disparities. Limited access to healthy food options, healthcare, and safe environments due to economic constraints perpetuates health inequities. Addressing these commercial determinants of health is vital for reducing health disparities and promoting health equity.

Environmental Impacts

Commercial activities can have adverse effects on the environment, which in turn impact public health. Industries that contribute to air and water pollution, deforestation, and climate change can lead to a range of health issues, including respiratory problems, infectious diseases, and increased vulnerability to extreme weather events. Addressing the commercial determinants of health requires considering the environmental impacts of industries and promoting sustainable practices that prioritize the health of both individuals and the planet.

Conclusion

Understanding and addressing the commercial determinants of health is crucial for improving population health outcomes in the modern day. The impact of industries on health extends beyond individual choices and behaviours. By recognizing the influence of commercial entities on product availability, marketing practices, policy-making, and socioeconomic inequalities, we can develop comprehensive public health strategies. Efforts to promote healthier products, responsible marketing practices, evidence-based policies, and health equity require collaboration among stakeholders, including public health professionals, policymakers, and commercial sectors. By tackling the commercial determinants of health, we can work towards a healthier society where the pursuit of profit aligns with (or is not deemed to be superior to) the promotion of public health.