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Public Health

Social determinants of health inequalities

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Summary

The gross inequalities in health that we see within and between countries present a challenge to the world. That there should be a spread of life expectancy of 48 years among countries and 20 years or more within countries is not inevitable. A burgeoning volume of research identifies social factors at the root of much of these inequalities in health. Social determinants are relevant to communicable and non-communicable disease alike. Health status, therefore, should be of concern to policy makers in every sector, not solely those involved in health policy. As a response to this global challenge, WHO is launching a Commission on Social Determinants of Health, which will review the evidence, raise societal debate, and recommend policies with the goal of improving health of the world's most vulnerable people. A major thrust of the Commission is turning public-health knowledge into political action.

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