Wellness First: Understanding Wellness as a Social Justice Issue

Cathy Cave, Inspired Vision, LLC
An Invitation

*It doesn’t interest me what you do for a living, I want to know what you ache for and if you dare to dream of meeting your heart’s longing...*

- Oriah Mountain Dreamer
How can this conversation be shared in communities?
Wellness First Approach

An approach to community wellness that makes use of the wellness resources *already available* in that community.
Taking a Wellness First Approach

• Human capital
  • “Education, training, and health are the most important investments in human capital” – Becker, 1975

• Social capital
  • Social networks have value
  • Turn “I” perspective and mentality into “we”

The Problem With Outside–In Approaches

Experience Can Impact Connection

- Access and Connection to Trusted Others
- Historical Experience
- Interpersonal Violence
- Self Identity
- Organizational Behaviors and Attitudes
- Community Experiences

Cave, 2014
Wellness as a Social Justice Issue

• Marginalized communities are at higher levels of risk for mental health challenges and related chronic diseases
  • High levels of stress
  • Allostatic load
A Public Health Approach to Wellness and Mental Health

- Public health is defined as “what we, as a society, do collectively to assure the conditions for people to be healthy”
- Not about us vs. them
- Not about their problem
- Socioecological approach


CDC, 2015
Community Factors That Influence Mental/Health Status

- Allostatic Load
- Inadequate Transportation
- Long Commutes
- Lack of Affordable Housing
- Confrontations with Landlords
- Difficulty Paying Mortgage
- Lack of social capital or social networks
- Racism
- Institutionalized Oppression
- Microaggressions
- High Demand-Low Control Jobs
- Overworked, Underpaid
- Unemployment
- Lack of Access to Stores, Healthy Foods
- Lack of Community Resources
- Violence
- Crime
- Community Trauma

Adapted from Iton, 2016
The stress effect

Middle-class people aren’t living as long as wealthier people in the same area. One explanation is chronic stress — those experiencing more financial hardships and dealing with more everyday worries aren’t as healthy as wealthier people. Over time, chronic stress can lead to a condition called allostatic load, which becomes even more pronounced in people lower on the socioeconomic ladder.

Stress and cortisol

In response to stress or perceived danger, hormones produced by the adrenal glands (including cortisol and adrenaline) work together when the body must react quickly to sudden threatening situations.

Cortisol and craving

The hormone cortisol is secreted from the adrenal gland and helps regulate glucose, which the body uses for energy. But chronic stress creates a constant state of alarm, making the body crave sugar and carbohydrates.

Long-term effects of high allostatic load

- Elevated levels of cortisol can create a feeling of hunger, leading to overeating and obesity.
- High blood pressure
- Poor glucose regulation. Under stress, people crave sugar and carbohydrates, which give a quick boost, but then lead to a drop in energy. Over time, this increases the risk of developing diabetes.
- Lowered immune system resistance: can lead to inflammation and increased odds of developing many diseases.

We may be aware or unaware.
 Responses may be visible or invisible.

Information from internal and sensory sources

There are neurobiological and developmental impacts!

Moss 2013,
Cave, Curley and Johnan 2015
Allostatic Load

- Refers to the wear and tear that the body experiences due to repeated cycles of allostasis as well as the inefficient turning-on or shutting off of these responses

- Allostasis
  - "maintaining stability (or homeostasis) through change" was introduced by Sterling and Eyer to describe how the cardiovascular system adjusts to resting and active states of the body

Bruce McEwen and Teresa Seeman in collaboration with the Allostatic Load Working Group, as cited by Iton, 2016

UCSF Research Network on SES & Health
Weathering

• Early health deterioration

• One study found poor and nonpoor Black women had the highest and second highest probability of high allostatic load score

• “Persistent racial differences in health may be influenced by the stress of living in a race-conscious society; these effects may be felt particularly by Black women because of “double jeopardy” (gender and racial discrimination)”

Geronimus et al., 2005
Why Wellness First is Necessary

Mental health not good for $\geq$14 days among adults aged $\geq$18 years by census tract, Albany, NY, 2014
Mental health not good for ≥14 days among adults aged ≥18 years by census tract, New York, NY, 2014

Percent (%)
- 4.4 - 8.4
- 8.5 - 10.1
- 10.2 - 11.8
- 11.9 - 13.6
- 13.7 - 15.4
- 15.5 - 17.2
- 17.3 - 19.1
- 19.2 - 21.5
- 21.6 - 30.3

Classification:
Jenks natural breaks (9 classes) based on data for all 500 cities' census tracts. Legend depicts only those data classes within this map extent.

Census tracts with population less than 50 were excluded from map.

Data sources:
Lack of Wellness Has an Impact

- Wellness is everyone’s job
- Not being well can influence our ability to:
  - Work
  - Socialize
  - Be present
  - Cope
Mobilizing Community Wellness Resources

• Who’s already in the community that can move a wellness agenda forward?
  • Community Action Agencies
  • Food Pantries
  • Community Gardens
  • Hospitals
  • Shelters
  • Elected Officials
  • Housing Groups
  • Faith-based Organizations
Existing Resources Can Transform Social Determinants

• Examples of Negative Social Determinants
  • Poverty
  • Discrimination
  • Social Exclusion
  • Poor Quality Education
  • Lack of Access to Quality Health Care
  • Little or No Access to Quality Foods

Adapted from Manderscheid, R. (2014). Role of social determinants in prevention, trauma, and recovery. [PowerPoint]
Existing Resources Can Transform Social Determinants

• **Examples of Positive Social Determinants**
  
  • Social Support and Inclusion
  • A Nurturing Family for Children
  • Good Health Education
  • Positive Role Models
  • Opportunities for Engagement in the Community

Adapted from Manderscheid, R. (2014). Role of social determinants in prevention, trauma, and recovery. [PowerPoint]
The Five Key Determinants

• Economic Stability
• Education
• Social and Community Context
• Health and Health Care
• Neighborhood and Built Environment

Supporting Community Emotional and Physical Wellness

• Trauma-informed Communities
• Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)
I want to know if you will stand in the center of the fire with me and not shrink back...

- Oriah Mountain Dreamer
Trauma-informed Communities

• Planning and actions are based on understanding trauma and its impact
• Focused on conveying understanding about “What happened to you?” not “What’s wrong with you?”
• Teach about trauma and seek to understand the meaning people make of their experiences
Trauma-informed Communities

- Facilitate non-threatening ways of being in relationship
- Incorporate knowledge about trauma in all aspects of community support and service delivery
- Avoid revictimization, minimize retraumatization
Trauma-informed Communities

• Take particular care to create welcoming, culturally-responsive, and accessible environments

• Hold transparent conversations about what is happening and create inclusive opportunities for participation
Focus on resilience, healing, and mutual support

Discuss definitions of safety and work collaboratively to honor what people need
ABCD’s three essential qualities:

• Asset Based
• Internally Focused
• Relationship Driven

There are resources in every community that are not utilized or are under-utilized. Why is this true?

Kretzmann, J. P., & McKnight, J. (1993). Building communities from the inside out: a path toward finding and mobilizing a community’s assets. Evanston, IL : Chicago, IL: Asset-Based Community Development Institute, Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University.
Tapping Into Community Willingness to Learn, Grow, and Act

• Help people to discover the strengths, gifts and talents they have to give to their communities.
• Once engaged in conversations they care about people respond in remarkable ways.
• Extend the invitation, create accessible and inclusive conversations about wellness!
COMMUNITY ASSETS MAP

Local INSTITUTIONS

Businesses

Schools

CHURCHES

Citizen’s ASSOCIATIONS

BLOCK CLUBS

Parks

Gift of INDIVIDUALS

Libraries

Youth

Artists

Income

Elderly

Labeled People

Hospitals

CULTURAL GROUPS

Community Colleges
Asset Based Community Development

A process to facilitate relationships that generate productive connections among the five building blocks of community

• Individuals
• Volunteer Associations
• Institutions
• The Local Economy
• The Physical World
Rethink Accessibility

- Physical
- Cultural and Linguistic
- Attitudinal

Support Community Leadership. When we come together, we are powerful!
The Emerging Pillars of Wellbeing

• Belonging, Connectedness
• Control of Destiny
• Dignity
• Hope and Aspiration
• Safety
• Trust

What Action Will You Take?

• What can you learn?
• What can you share?
• What will you do?

• What will your commitment be?
You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the time.

- Angela Davis
Cathy Cave
cathycave55@gmail.com

Crystal L. Brandow
cbrandow@prainc.com

Inspired Vision, LLC