PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

The adoption of principles of social justice is fundamental to effective health promotion. These principles seek to ensure that individuals and groups identified as being the most disadvantaged (and therefore most likely to be experiencing poor health) are provided with sufficient resources and support to empower them to improve their health. On occasions this can see significantly more resources being allocated to particular groups compared to the general population in an effort to narrow the gap that exists and improve the health of the whole population. Agreement with social justice principles requires a valuing of diversity, the provision of equal opportunities to maintain equity and the creation of supportive environments to promote better health.

Figure 3.13: The principles of social justice include the need to make health services equal for all groups in the population.

Equity

Equity means taking action to achieve fairness. In health, this is done by allocating resources and entitlements, including power, fairly across the population. The needs of individuals and populations have to be carefully considered to ensure all individuals within society have access to the same opportunities for achieving optimal health. People experiencing extreme disadvantage such as those suffering poor health, living in poverty or in remote locations need to be allocated more resources if their health outcomes are to change. In other words, people who are disadvantaged may need to be treated differently to be treated equally.

INQUIRY: Inequities in indigenous communities
Read the snapshot about remote community stores and answer the following questions.

1. According to the Dietitians Association of Australia, what inequities exist in relation to the availability of food for indigenous people in remote communities?

2. Outline the measures proposed to address these inequities.

3. Explain how implementing these strategies would promote improved health for indigenous people in remote locations.

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**SNAPSHOT**

**Remote community stores are part of the answer to close the gap in Indigenous health**

Australia’s peak nutrition body is calling on the Federal Government to boost funding for community food stores in remote communities. The Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) said the government has to give community stores the same importance as water supplies, schools and health services if it wants to improve the health of the nation’s Indigenous people.

Executive Director of DAA Claire Hewat said: ‘Income drops as you get more remote, but the cost of food, and especially healthy food, rises dramatically compared with the major cities.’

According to a recent study in the *Medical Journal of Australia*, a healthy food basket costs 30 per cent more in very remote areas of Queensland, compared with major cities.

Ms Hewat said remote stores play a crucial role in the health and well-being of the community, but too often lacked good quality, affordable fresh fruits and vegetables. And she said the availability of poor quality foods like soft drinks, sweets and deep fried foods often made choosing a healthy diet in a remote area difficult.

DAA said one in three Aboriginal people over the age of 15 worry about going without food. Access to adequate food for a nutritious diet is a basic human right, and too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are missing out, according to Ms Hewat.

In its recent submission to the Federal Government’s inquiry into remote community stores in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, DAA called for better infrastructure, financial support and education to run food stores that supply fresh fruit and vegetables and other healthy foods at a reasonable cost.


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**Diversity**

Australia is an extremely diverse nation, not only in terms of our multicultural populations but also in terms of the varying social ‘markers’, for example, age, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, geographic location and levels of educational achievement. These social ‘markers’ require attention to make things fair and just, so that the inequalities and injustices in relation to health are questioned and challenged and inclusiveness is promoted.

In order to raise the levels of health currently experienced by the whole population and to narrow the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged groups in Australia, it is important that health promotion strategies recognise and acknowledge the diversity that exists between various groups. This assists the tailoring of strategies to better cater for the particular needs of different groups. For example, initiatives targeted at people living in rural locations need to be designed and delivered in different ways from those developed for urban residents. Providing people from particular groups with a voice in determining their own health needs and actively involving them in planning is one way of ensuring the appropriateness of programs.
Sensitivity to a person's cultural background and beliefs is an important component of effective health promotion. Language barriers, misconceptions, lack of cultural awareness and unfamiliarity with health support services can all limit people's ability to access information and support. The development of culturally appropriate resources, the provision of health promotion material in languages other than English and the involvement of health workers from specific cultural backgrounds in the planning and delivery of initiatives are examples of ways of demonstrating that diversity is valued.

**Figure 3.14**: Health needs and issues differ in Australia's culturally diverse communities.

**Supportive environments**

The social environment in which a person lives or works has a significant influence on that person’s level of health and their ability to be able to make changes to improve their health. Good health is achieved in environments that:

- are relatively free of violence, pollution and that have a regular supply of safe water and nutritious food
- have an adequate supply of basic necessities such as clothing, shelter and transport
- provide opportunities for recreation and variety in daily living
- cause less stress
- are relatively free of factors that cause isolation and alienation
- have low levels of poverty
- provide safe and interesting work.

Strategies that aim to promote better health need to address the social, cultural, physical and economic factors present in people's lives in order to create environments that are supportive of health. For example, a person who works a long distance from home in a sedentary job, with no public transport available to them and few exercise facilities in their local area may find it difficult to regularly participate in physical activity. The environment in which they live and work creates barriers that make it harder for them to choose to be active. Changes in work practices, a wider range of transport and employment options, and improved local facilities are needed to create an environment that is more supportive of their health.

In some cases government legislation or policies may be required to bring about changes to...
environments so they better support good health. Government legislation that bans smoking in restaurants, government buildings, pubs, clubs and transport services; laws around speeding in school zones; policies around healthy school canteens; and occupational health and safety laws are all examples of government actions that assist in the creation of environments that promote improved health outcomes.

Incorporating principles of social justice in health promotion initiatives does not inevitably mean improvements in health will take place. The allocation of additional resources and support to particular individuals or groups does not necessarily result in equity in terms of health outcomes, nor does the design of supportive environments guarantee lifestyle changes. People may continue to engage in health risk behaviours that negatively affect their health. Following these principles does, however, provide all Australians with the opportunity to exercise greater control over their own level of health in order to bring about improvements.

**INQUIRY: Applying social justice principles**

1. Research the ‘Go for 2&5’ campaign which aims to increase people's consumption of fruit and vegetables. Use the [Go for 2&5 weblink](#) in your eBookPLUS to find information.

2. Identify strategies used as part of the campaign that demonstrate an application of the principles of social justice.

3. Research other health promotion initiatives such as those relating to physical activity, sun protection, road safety or tobacco use. Identify strategies within these initiatives where social justice principles have been applied.

4. Report your findings to the class.