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Contemporary Families in the U.S.

The Social Determinants of Health

The five domains of social determinants of health (SDOH) are Education Access and Quality, Economic Stability, Social and Community Context, Neighborhood and Built Environment, and Health Care Access and Quality. In terms of education, having early schooling like a quality preschool system means that children will start their cognitive development early. This will encourage further development and health of their brains, as well as early detection of developmental health issues. Economic stability plays a role in that higher and more stable income allows people to afford better healthcare, nutrition, and shelter. With better nutrition and shelter, the likelihood of disease is lower, and treatment of existing diseases is much easier. Social context also contributes to better health, mostly on the mental side. If someone has a strong social support system they will receive better emotional support, which can aid them when going through tough times. On the neighborhood side, living in a good community that has access to affordable grocery stores can benefit health, but living somewhere that has poor housing conditions can lead to illnesses and other health problems. For instance, if someone’s housing arrangement worsens their allergies or has poor air quality, they may struggle with long-term health conditions. Lastly, healthcare access and quality holds yet another major role in someone’s wellbeing. Having health insurance and doctors nearby will allow someone to get fast medical treatment at a lower cost, which can improve their odds of curing a chronic illness.

I am exploring Benton County, Oregon, which holds my hometown of Corvallis, Oregon. In terms of Health Outcomes, Benton County ranks in the top 10% healthiest counties in the United States. On the basis of Health Factors, Benton County also sits in the top 20% healthiest counties. One social determinant of health that contributes to Benton County staying healthy is Education Access and Quality. Because Oregon State sits in the middle of the county, most of the people that live here either attend the school or are associated with it in some way. This means these people are engaging their mind often, which increases cognition and keeps the brain healthy. The environment of Benton County also allows for access to exercise opportunities, encouraging residents to keep their bodies moving. This benefits both physical and mental health, as the ability to get in nature and move your body brings peace of mind and helps with sleep. Lastly, Benton County has great access to healthcare, with there being a different physician for under 1,000 residents (as opposed to the national ratio of 1,330:1). This means that people in Benton County will receive faster and more personalized care, which will help with treatment and prevention of disease.

One area where the health of the residents in Benton County could be improved is housing problems. Compared to the 17% in the United States, Benton County has a 20% housing problem rate. This is likely due to the high cost of living here, forcing residents to make decisions between their health care and housing situation. To help the situation, Benton County and the cities within it should implement policies that enforce rent control or subsidize low-income families. This would give struggling families the opportunity to use more of their income for health care and nutrition, which would improve their health and overall well-being. It would also reduce the stress on the family, which would help the parents’ mental health and give them the opportunity to spend more time with their children.