

January 2022

Reframing Public Health Centering Community Resilience

Executive Summary

**Maine Resilience
Building Network**

www.maineresilience.org





**Reframing Public Health Through a Community Resilience Lens - The Maine Resilience Building Network (MRBN)
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- ◆ Numerous reports have highlighted the current state of mental and physical health issues in the context of an array of challenging social conditions. The COVID pandemic has shed light on serious issues that have previously existed. For example, The US Surgeon General has issued a Surgeon General’s Advisory on Protecting Youth Mental Health (<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-youth-mental-health-advisory.pdf>). Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, recognized that these issues predate, but are exacerbated by the pandemic. A group of national child health experts, in Fall 2021, declared a National State of Emergency in Children’s Mental Health.
- ◆ Maine was facing a youth mental health crisis, even as we headed into the pandemic. According to the 2019 National Survey of Children’s Health, Maine has the nation’s highest rate of children with diagnosed anxiety disorders, and the third highest rate of children with diagnosed depression. In the 2019 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS), 20 percent of middle school students and 16 percent of high schoolers said they have seriously considered suicide. At the same time, 41 percent of middle school students and 43 percent of high school students said they don’t feel they matter in their community. The numbers are even higher among high school students who identify as LGBTQ, with 63 percent saying they don’t feel they matter. Without that sense of connectedness, youth lack a key protective factor for anxiety, depression, suicide, and other diseases of despair. It is in recognition and response to this data that MRBN initiated the *Cultivating Mattering for Maine Youth* initiative to advance social connectedness and mattering for Maine youth.
- ◆ Whereas public health has frequently focused on specific problems- tobacco prevention and control, HIV prevention, substance use disorder and recently the opioid epidemic, or on specific populations- adolescent health, healthy aging, etc. to assure that community-based public health prevention initiatives are addressing the root causes of these health issues and impacting health equity, it is necessary to reframe public health as implemented in the community by going upstream and assuring that community systems and collaborations are developed through **community resilience strategies**. Upstream prevention strategies have been recognized as essential to address numerous public health issues including chronic diseases, injuries and the “diseases of despair”, suicide, excessive alcohol use, and substance use including the opioid epidemic.

- ◆ It has been increasingly recognized that the social determinants of health (SDOH) - the conditions in which we are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age have a profound impact on health. They influence the opportunities available to us to practice healthy behaviors, enhancing or limiting our ability to live healthy lives. The SDOH are important frames for public health action and to substantially improve public health outcomes, SDOH framed strategies must be an integral part of public health at all levels.
- ◆ Social isolation is a significant contributor to morbidity and early mortality, and increasingly, social connectedness is recognized as a critical social determinant. The US CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (NCCDPHP) has indicated that Social Connectedness is one of the five priority Social Determinants of Health. The US DHHS's Healthy People 2030 states, "People's relationships and interactions with family, friends, co-workers, and community members can have a major impact on their health and well-being...Positive relationships at home, at work, and in the community can help reduce these negative impacts. But some people — like children whose parents are in jail and adolescents who are bullied — often don't get support from loved ones or others. ***Interventions to help people get the social and community support they need are critical for improving health and well-being.*** *Healthy Places by Design* noted, "solutions which rely solely on programs, promotions, and education are not enough. They must also be intentionally integrated with community-level environments, policies, and systemic supports that are designed for specific results—in this case, for meaningful social connection".
- ◆ By reframing public health through a community-resilience lens, we can build stronger community systems and structures that can address a wide range of health challenges broadly defined. Such an approach is critical to promoting health equity and addressing systemic root causes. The Community Resilience-framed approach to public health enables community-driven solutions to a wide range of health issues.
- ◆ The Community Resilience-framed approach to public health enables community-driven, multi-sector solutions to a wide range of health issues and prosperity. A community resilience strategy involves upstream, protective factors and addresses root causes of social determinants of health. Strong social support and social connectedness is key to a resilience-framed community health model. The Community Resilience Frame is important for health equity, school connectedness and for—a stronger developing workforce in Maine. To truly elevate Youth Mattering/social connectedness and have support for youth to thrive, it is critical that communities, businesses, governments, schools, and civic organizations collaborate to change systems and policies to support social connectedness through a Community Resilience-framed public health strategy. This reframing takes communities and systems upstream so that other community health initiatives are strongly supported for sustainable success, assuring long-standing root causes of health issues and inequities are addressed.