

The health impact pyramid for public health practice

A summary of

Frieden, T.R. (2010). A framework for public health action: The health impact pyramid. *American Journal of Public Health*, 100(4):590-595.



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Categories:

Method, Priority setting, Program planning

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Method

Relevance For Public Health

This framework is useful for public health professionals as it provides a simple means of structuring public health interventions based on the impact they have on the general public. It has been used in oral health reform in Nova Scotia.

Description

The health impact pyramid can be used as a framework for public health action. This five-tier pyramid describes various public health interventions and which level of the pyramid they impact. Public health interventions have increasing “population impact” as one goes down the pyramid, and increasing “individual effort” needed as one goes up the pyramid. The health impact pyramid suggests that addressing the base of the pyramid (socioeconomic factors) has the greatest potential to improve population health, while addressing the top of the pyramid (individual behaviour change) is least effective, but most readily available.

Implementing the Tool

Who is Involved?

This framework is useful for anyone examining or implementing a public health intervention and seeking to uncover how it impacts the population.

Steps for Using Tool

Public health professionals can use the health impact pyramid to explore various interventions and examine how they impact the population. Interventions at the top of the pyramid are designed to help individuals, while interventions at the base are designed to help entire populations. The paper also presents structural approaches to health promotion for communicable disease, non-communicable disease and injury prevention.

The five levels of the health impact pyramid from top to bottom include:

1. Counselling and education
2. Clinical interventions
3. Long-lasting protective interventions
4. Changing the context to make individuals’ default decisions healthy
5. Socioeconomic factors

Examples of interventions for oral health reform at each level of the pyramid include the following:

1. Counselling and education: Behavioural change and cessation to promote oral health and prevent oral disease
2. Clinical interventions: Plaque and calculus removal, tooth restoration and replacement
3. Long-lasting protective interventions: Dental sealants, topical fluorides
4. Changing the context: Water fluoridation, taxation of high sugar consumption, tobacco, alcohol
5. Socioeconomic factors: Poverty reduction, improved education

Conditions for Use

These summaries are written by the NCCMT to condense and to provide an overview of the resources listed in the [Registry of Methods and Tools](#) and to give suggestions for their use in a public health context. For more information on individual methods and tools included in the review, please consult the authors/developers of the original resources.

Evaluation and Measurement Characteristics

Evaluation

Information not available

Validity

Not applicable

Reliability

Not applicable

Methodological Rating



Not applicable

Tool Development

Developers

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Method of Development

Release Date

2010

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Resources

Title of Primary Resource	A framework for public health action: The health impact pyramid
File Attachment	None
Web-link	https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2836340/pdf/590.pdf
Reference	Frieden, T.R. (2010). A framework for public health action: The health impact pyramid. <i>American Journal of Public Health, 100(4):590-595.</i>
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