

Problem:

Health disparities and inequities are prevalent among Americans, with oral health challenges among the most persistent.¹ Inequities in oral health status, such as higher incidence of untreated tooth decay, edentulism, periodontal disease, oral cancer, and adverse health outcomes are driven by SDoH.² Although state and territorial oral health programs (S/TOHP) work to address relevant SDoH for their states or jurisdictions, they may encounter substantial challenges in accessing evidence-informed, well-articulated resources specifically related to oral health. A step-by-step method to approaching SDoH is needed, as are resources to diverse frameworks that can be modified to monitor and address SDoH in various settings.

Background:

Without addressing these determinants, health disparities cannot be reduced or eliminated. Research shows that addressing SDoH, particularly through *upstream* factors (e.g. fluoridated water), makes a difference in the health of communities.^{3,4} For example, a 2015 review in PLOS ONE found that 82% of initiatives targeting SDoH had significant positive health

outcomes and/or cost reductions.⁵ States need a way to address SDoH in order to decrease oral health disparities in a way that is systematic and can be individualized for their populations' unique needs.

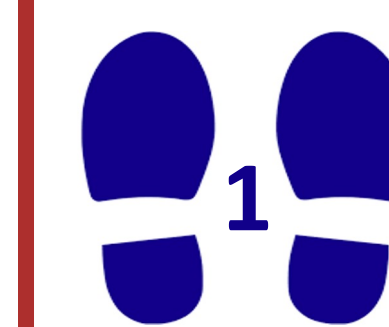


Figure 1: The five domains of SDoH proposed by *Healthy People 2030*.⁷ The five domains are economic stability, education access and quality, health care access and quality, neighborhood and environment, and social and community context. While these domains have been proposed in HP 2030, the measures and individual factors addressed in research and in care settings vary.



Methods:

To effectively reduce oral health inequities, S/TOHP need to address *downstream* behaviors and adopt a multi-pronged approach that focuses on understanding SDoH. They can address SDoH from a public health and community level perspective, or by collaborating with health professional providers and educators. A four-step, community-based framework to address SDoH with a focus on oral health was developed by the Center for Health Care Strategies.⁹ This framework entails the following steps:



Identifying the social determinants of oral health in a community. This requires defining the community by characteristics such as geographic location, population demographics, and languages spoken. This step can provide guidance for tailoring oral health interventions to community needs. Next, a community needs assessment (CNA) can be used to identify SDoH related to oral health.



Mapping and mobilizing available community resources through partnerships. This step involves determining the skills, capacities, experiences, and partnerships necessary to enact change in the areas identified by the CNA. Engaging community infrastructures, resources, and assets begins with communicating findings from the CNA to key community stakeholders to solicit their feedback, discover how they may be able to contribute, and understand which SDoH are priorities for the community.^{10, 11} Solidifying and sustaining partnerships requires building trust and developing a common vision, which represents and reflects a mutual understanding of SDoH affecting the community and a commitment to resolving them.



Selecting approaches to take action. Once the healthcare team establishes a common vision, an action plan for addressing the priority SDoH can be developed. For example, CDC has outlined six approaches to addressing SDoH:

1. Consciousness raising
2. Community development
3. Social action
4. Health promotion
5. Media advocacy
6. Policy and environmental change¹⁰



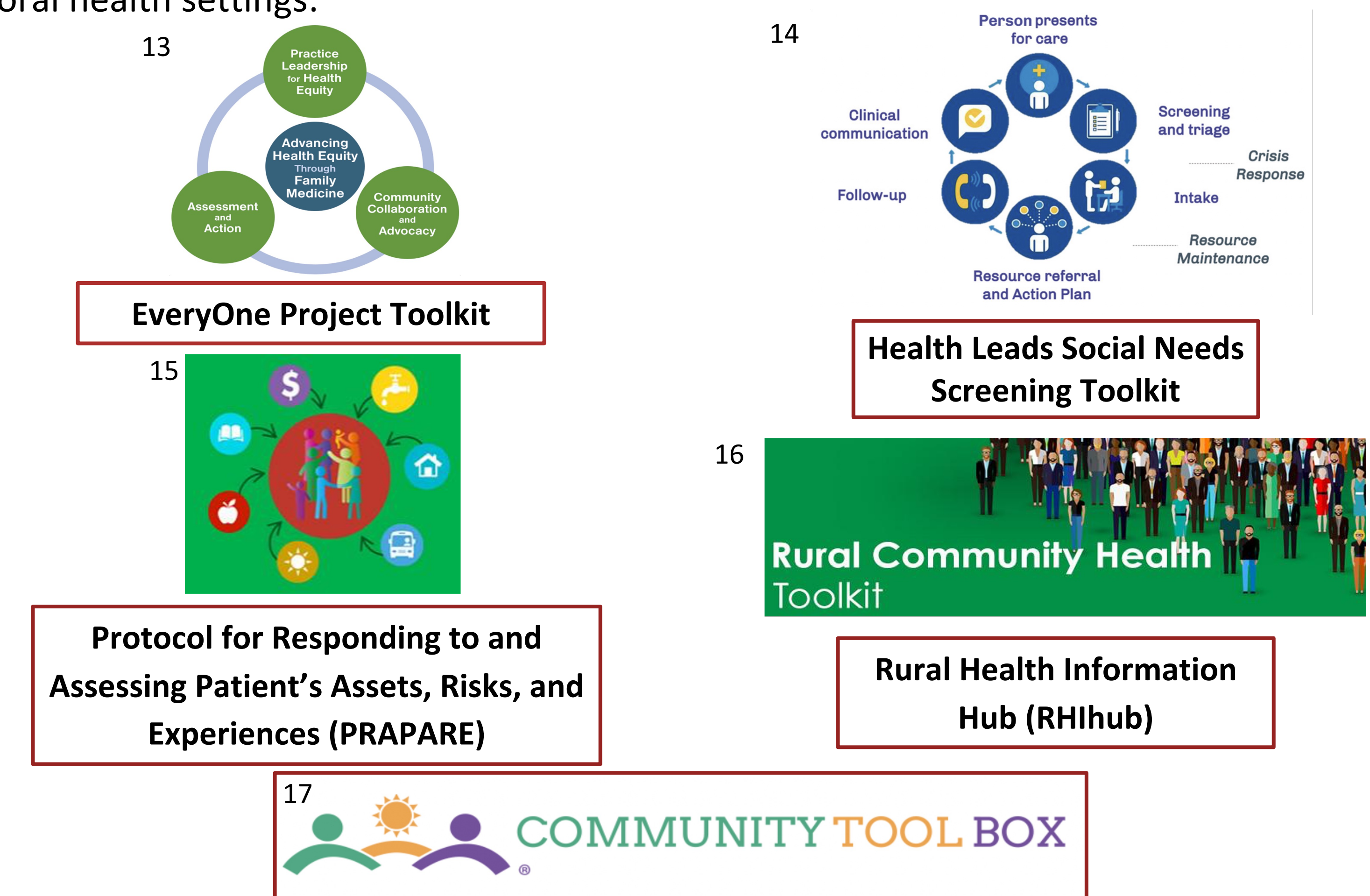
Evaluating implementation and impact. This entails establishing an evaluation plan, with metrics that can be at the individual, organizational, or community levels, that enables the interventions to stay on course towards the identified goals and objectives.¹⁰ The evaluation process will inform the strengths and weaknesses of the interventions, thus allowing refinements and improvements to be made and help strengthen the community's engagement and ability to sustain change.¹²

Policy Statement

ASTDD supports strategies to address SDoH to improve oral health equity. S/TOHP need to address factors such as behaviors (e.g., toothbrushing or consuming sugary foods and beverages), and adopt a multi-pronged approach that focuses on understanding the contributing factors (SDoH). S/TOHP can work proactively in partnerships with state dental/dental hygiene associations, health and public health professional organizations, and community groups to incorporate principles that address SDoH into their program and policy initiatives.

Next Steps:

The following toolkits and frameworks for identifying and addressing SDoH can be adapted for use in oral health settings:



S/TOHP can apply the above step-by-step process to identify their own approach to address SDoH to promote more equitable oral health outcomes, and can collaborate and partner with health organizations on initiatives to promote wider understanding of the relationships between SDoH and oral health. Clearer guidelines and approaches are needed to help guide dental health providers on how to effectively address SDoH in the dental setting.¹⁸

Scan QR Code for References



Scan QR Code for Toolkits



Scan QR Code for the Official Policy Statement

