

How non-health charities address the social determinants of health



Family

Our relationships with family members and experiences at home as children can impact our health throughout our life. The same is true when we grow up—caring responsibilities, family debt, and spousal conflict all affect an adult's health.

Evidence summary

Pages 28–36 of the [Evidence Review](#) discuss in detail the evidence that suggests the following:

- Circumstances during a mother's pregnancy impact a child's health across their life course.
- A high number of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) is damaging to a person's health throughout their life time. Abuse, neglect or bereavement are examples of adverse childhood experiences.
- Caring responsibilities can be financially and emotionally draining, and can result in social isolation.
- A good spousal relationship can have a positive impact on health, particularly mental health.

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) affect the likelihood of certain behaviours, such as smoking, in later life. People experiencing six or more ACEs are three times more likely to develop lung cancer, and have symptoms around 13 years earlier than those without ACEs.



Key evidence links to Education and skills: Maternal health, birth weight, stress, and cognitive stimulation of a child are all linked to how well they do at school. ACEs have also shown to lower grades, attendance and a higher placement in special education programmes.

Case Study: [Body & Soul](#) uses a comprehensive definition of health that, alongside physical and mental health, considers connectivity, capability, confidence and productivity. The charity was originally established to support people affected by HIV. It found that members' needs were not confined to the impact of HIV on physical health, but also experiences of trauma and adversity which further impacted all aspects of their lives.

Evidence of the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACE) on health and wellbeing supports these observations and drives its new strategy 'transforming childhood adversity'. Body & Soul's new model of care includes other communities at risk of having experienced childhood trauma, and focuses on supporting members to build resilience and mitigate the impact of past trauma and adversity.

Body & Soul uses the ACE score—which measures exposure to trauma during childhood—with members to understand their experiences and inform programme planning. It measures health outcomes and is constantly seeking ways to balance capturing impact whilst making sure members do not feel measurement is intrusive.

Body & Soul has used external evidence of the impact of ACEs to communicate their vision and model to funders, stakeholders, and members alike. By focusing on its health impact, Body & Soul has ensured its message is clear and fully encompasses the breadth of its work.

Challenges

Barriers to gathering and using evidence

- Because a family is more than one individual, and often made up of different generations, social determinants can have an impact in multiple ways:
 - Directly: Through the quality of family relationships, for example.
 - Indirectly: Through how the other determinants may impact the family—for example, good work and money and resources.
- Therefore, it can be harder to understand exactly which social determinant is having the impact on health.

Barriers within the sector and wider environment

- Family is closely related to other factors, such as poverty, employment and housing. These different drivers also make measurement—particularly understanding the impact of one intervention—complex.
- There are concerns about under resources in children’s social care budgets—the sector may be too stretched to think about linking work to health.

Opportunities

Opportunities for gathering and using evidence

- Appetite to prove the effectiveness of different approaches in this area may encourage the capturing of health outcomes.
- There is a current research interest in the link between aspects of family life—for example, shared parenting, fathers’ involvement—and parent and child mental health.
- A number of existing evaluations are exploring the links between family life and mental health and well-being—with a particular focus on the role of relationship support, domestic violence work and parenting support.
- There is an appetite for increasing the awareness of impact of domestic violence on children’s and women’s mental health.

Opportunities within the sector and wider environment

- Work by [the Early Intervention Foundation](#) on evaluating the cost of lack of preventative measures in its [Spending on late intervention: How we can do better for less](#) discusses family life as a determinant of health.
- [The Troubled Families Programme](#) has created a focus on vulnerable families, which may encourage an interest in the evidence on the link between family and health.

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