An introduction to
The Ecological Model
in Public Health

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First, an analogy...
Ecological Model in Public Health

“A model of health that emphasizes the linkages and relationships among multiple factors (or determinants) affecting health.”
(Institute of Medicine, 2003)

Determinants of Health
(Institute of Medicine, 2002)

A Very Brief History
- Origins in fields of psychology and human development
- Behavior placed in context, dynamic interplay of individual and environment
- Expanded on in public health disciplines (health promotion, epidemiology, maternal and child health, etc.)
- Now: Core component of public health training and competencies

The Ecological Model
"An ecologic or population health model...emphasizes the importance of the social and physical environments that strongly shape patterns of disease and injury as well as our responses to them over the entire life cycle..." (Fielding, Teutsch, Breslow, 2010)

Components of the Ecological Model
- Social/Policy
- Community
- Institutional
- Interpersonal
- Individual

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Ecological Model in Public Health

Use of Models in Public Health
- Organize thinking
- Guide design of interventions
- Evaluate effects of interventions

Application in Public Health

Example: Obesity
Social/Policy
Community
Institutional
Interpersonal
Individual
- Chemicals in foods and packaging
- Agricultural and school food programs/policies
- Zoning, parks
- Individual rights vs. regulation
- Access and affordability
- Outdoor spaces
- Community social norms
- School hours
- Food options
- Physical setting
- Access to health promoting services
- Family culture and traditions
- Caretaker behavior
- Time pressures
- Genetics
- Epigenetics
- Knowledge, attitudes, behavior

Health Impact Pyramid
(Frieden, 2010)

Explore next...
- Social determinants of health
  - “Health starts where we live, learn, work, and play”
  - Health equity
    - “Attainment of the highest level of health for all people” and elimination of health disparities (Healthy People 2000)
- Life course
  - Interplay of risk and protective factors across the life span
- Find resources on the MCH Navigator: navigator.mchtraining.net

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