

## Schools of Medicine and Dental Medicine

### Launch

## Book Club: Health Equity & The Political Determinants of Health

**Date/Time:** Tuesday, August 11, 2026: 3:00-4:30

**Faculty**                      **Facilitator:**                      **Zita Lazzarini**  
**Content Experts:**        **Sarita Arteaga, Linda Barry, Jeffrey Hines, Melinda Sanders, Chris Steele, SDEIC representatives**

**Key Words:** Health equity/inequities, political determinants of health, structural racism, systems thinking, health disparities, social determinants of health, race as a social construct

### **Health Systems Science Core Domains and Competencies:**

#### Systems-thinking

- Concepts related to the attention of a complex web of interdependence: awareness of the “whole,” not just the parts; and the ability to recognize multi-directional cause-effect relationships with all causes emerging as the effect of another system dynamics
  - Systems theory and systems dynamics
  - Structural competency

#### Policy, law, economics

- Concepts related to the decisions, plan, and actions undertaken to achieve specific health care goals and the issues related to efficiency, effectiveness, value, and behavior in the production and consumption of health care.

#### Population and public health

- Concepts related to the full range of health determinants affecting entire populations (rather than just individuals), traditional public health, and preventive medicine, and the care and improvement in outcomes or populations of patients, specifically in regard to the dynamic interrelationships among various personal, socioeconomic, and environmental factors
- Social determinants of health
  - Health care disparities (access issues to care) and health disparities (health outcome inequities)
  - The structural drivers of social determinants of health
  - The impact of structural racism and other "-isms" on health
- Public Health

- Socioecological model

## Summary

Health equity has been a stated goal of the federal government (through its health agencies), many state governments and national, state and local organizations.<sup>1</sup> The US spends more on health care than any other country in the world but ranks last compared to other countries of similar standing.<sup>2</sup> Although the rhetoric around health equity has changed within the last year, the problem still remains that the US experiences persistent health and healthcare disparities among our most vulnerable populations. *Health disparities* refer to unequal health outcomes, such as higher maternal mortality rates among Black women, driven by social, economic, and environmental disadvantages. *Healthcare disparities* involve unequal access to or quality of care, such as lower rates of cancer screening in low-income communities. This session will examine how political and structural factors shape both and how addressing them is essential to achieving health equity.

In this session you will have a chance to discuss both the chapters assigned as summer reading and a short selection of other readings relevant to this question. We will focus particularly on defining structural factors that influence health (institutional, social, and political determinants of health) as well as the role of policy and policy-making in achieving the goal of health equity.

**Learning Objectives:** At the completion of this session students will be able to:

1. Define health equity, health inequity, health difference, health disparity and healthcare disparity;
2. Distinguish political, structural, community, and individual determinants of health (models of causation and intervention);
3. Describe key components of the political determinants of health;
4. Describe how political and structural determinants of health lead to health outcomes and may promote either health equity or health disparities.
5. Explain the centrality of the political determinants of health to other determinants of health;
6. Apply these models to the current health care system and health outcomes in the US.
7. Identify examples of opportunities for interventions at the political (determinants) level to promote health equity and improve health outcomes for all.

## Required ReALMs

1. Dawes DE. The Political Determinants of Health (2020). Assigned readings: Chapter 1, 3, 7. (Objectives 1-6)
2. Steele CL. Basic Overview: Political Determinants of Health (2026) [https://kaltura.uconn.edu/media/Political+Determinants+of+Health/1\\_7xikwg9o](https://kaltura.uconn.edu/media/Political+Determinants+of+Health/1_7xikwg9o) (Objectives 3-7)

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<sup>1</sup> The US spends more on health care than any other country in the world but ranks only 47<sup>th</sup> in terms of health outcomes. List: DHHS, NIH, CDC, CMS, AMA, NRHA, Families USA, NAM, Colorado, NC, Washington, etc.

<sup>2</sup> **U.S. Health Care System Ranks Last Overall Among Other High-Income Countries,** *American Journal of Managed Care*, September 19, 2024.

3. The Political Determinants of Health: Jessica’s Story (video), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G54x6Y-aJvE> (Objectives 2, 4, 6)
4. Ndugga N, Artiga S. Disparities in Health and Health Care: 5 Key Questions and Answers. Kaiser Family Foundation, April 21, 2023, at: <https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/issue-brief/disparities-in-health-and-health-care-5-key-question-and-answers/> (Objectives 1, 2, 4)
5. Tellez M, Zini A, Estupinan-Day S. Social Determinants of Oral Health: An Update. Curr Oral Health Rep. 2014; 1:148-152. DOI 10.1007/s40496-014-0019-6. (pdf posted) (Objectives 1, 2, 4, 6, 7)



### How to access Dawes DE. The Political Determinants of Health (2020)

- From public library: Connecticut public libraries have copies of this book. Use findITCT. [https://finditct.org/eg/opac/results?detail\\_record\\_view=1&modifier=metabib&query=title%3Athe+political+determinants+of+health&qtype=title&fi%3Asearch\\_format=book&detail\\_record\\_view=ARRAY%280x5597c2ad4868%29&adv=1&page=0&sort=&modifier=metabib](https://finditct.org/eg/opac/results?detail_record_view=1&modifier=metabib&query=title%3Athe+political+determinants+of+health&qtype=title&fi%3Asearch_format=book&detail_record_view=ARRAY%280x5597c2ad4868%29&adv=1&page=0&sort=&modifier=metabib)
- Through Amazon. The kindle edition is currently listed at \$28.45 or paperback for \$30, or used from \$13.53. You do not need a kindle device to read a kindle book, the app is available for free in any app store. Book at: [https://www.amazon.com/s?k=the+political+determinants+of+health+by+daniel+e.+dawes&crd=25S8T3WG4Z1U1&sprefix=Dawes%2C+the+politi%2Caps%2C105&ref=nb\\_sb\\_ss\\_p13n-pd-dplr-ranker\\_2\\_17](https://www.amazon.com/s?k=the+political+determinants+of+health+by+daniel+e.+dawes&crd=25S8T3WG4Z1U1&sprefix=Dawes%2C+the+politi%2Caps%2C105&ref=nb_sb_ss_p13n-pd-dplr-ranker_2_17)

### Required Assignments (to be completed before class)

None.

### Required Assignments (to be completed after class):

None.

### Additional ReALMs (these are optional and NOT required):