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Health and its Social Determinants

P Buss

A Pellegrini Filho

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Objectives: To analyze the relationship between health and social determinants, as well as presenting the objectives and lines of action of the National Commission on the Social Determinants of Health (NCSDH) created in Brazil in 2006.

Methodology: Interpretive and analytical

Results: The authors present a series of definitions in order to explain what the social determinants of health are and under what paradigms they were constructed as concepts throughout history. They discuss several studies about the relationship between social determinants and health, indicating their advances and challenges. The authors present models proposed by Dahlgren and Whitehead and by Didericksen and Evans, showing the different levels of social determinants and their degree of connection to the health situation. Furthermore, they identify a series of possibilities for intervention through policies and programs, with the goal of reducing health inequities. The authors explain the creation of the National Commission on the Social Determinants of Health as a response to the world movement about this theme, which was stimulated by the World Health Organization (WHO). The principal objectives of the Brazilian commission are: to produce knowledge and information about the social determinants of health in Brazil; support the development of policies and programs for the promotion of equity in health; and promote activities of social mobilization that raise awareness and act upon social determinants and their effects on the health of society.

Conclusions: For the authors, the study of and awareness about the social determinants of health are of vital importance to the promotion and development of policies and programs designed to eliminate inequities in health care. The activities and actions of the National Commission on the Social Determinants of Health are valuable contributions to the Brazilian health reform and to the construction of a more humane and just society.