

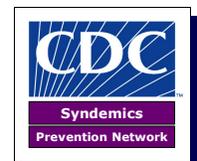
About the Network

SYNDEMIC: two or more afflictions, interacting synergistically, contributing to excess burden of disease in a population. Related concepts include linked epidemics, interacting epidemics, connected epidemics, co-occurring epidemics, comorbidities, and clusters of health-related crises.

SYNDEMIC ORIENTATION: a public health perspective that assesses connections between health-related problems, considers those connections when developing prevention policies, and aligns with other avenues of social change to assure the conditions in which people can be healthy. This orientation complements single-issue prevention strategies, which can be effective for discrete problems but often are mismatched to the goal of improving community health in its widest sense.

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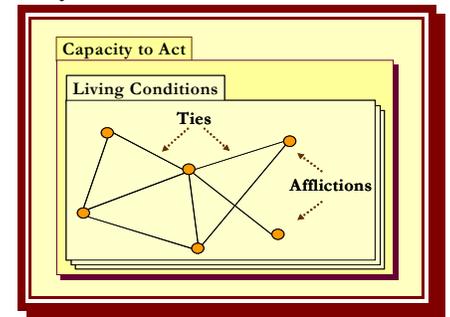


About the Syndemics Prevention Network

Seeing Syndemics

“*Syndemic*” refers to the phenomenon of linked afflictions. Although scholars and practitioners have long observed interactions among health problems, it wasn’t until the early 1990s that Merrill Singer suggested that empirical connections among epidemics might signify the existence of a higher-order phenomenon. Syndemics occur when health-related problems cluster by person, place, or time. The problems—along with the reasons for their clustering—define a syndemic and differentiate one from another. To prevent a syndemic, one must address not only each affliction but also the forces that tie them together.

A Syndemic Network



Overcoming “Hardening of the Categories”

Acknowledging the distinction between a single epidemic and the phenomenon of syndemics expands the science, practice, and policy aspects of prevention. Despite the clear and frequent connections among illnesses, most prevention practitioners operate with resources dedicated to specific categorical problems. In fact, the categorical approach is so entrenched that the public health system is itself plagued by a condition known as “hardening of the categories”. For communities with multiple interacting afflictions, the desire to engage in comprehensive health planning stands in contrast to what most public health agencies are prepared to do. Ingrained in financial structures, scientific frameworks, and statistical models is the idea that each disease can be prevented individually by understanding its unique causes and developing targeted interventions. The Syndemics Prevention Network was formed to explore how public health science and action might be different under a syndemic orientation.

Placing Afflictions in a Dynamic Community Context

Whereas conventional prevention strategies address one issue at a time and begin by defining the disease in question, a syndemic orientation places multiple afflictions in context. The first task is to define the community in question and with that as a frame of reference, the next step involves identifying links among the entire set of issues that create excess burden of disease among the community's members. A syndemic orientation elevates public health inquiry beyond its individual categories to examine directly the conditions that create and sustain health. It then presses on to question how and why those conditions differ among groups; and goes even further to engage the struggle for directed social change. Underlying each step are analytic procedures designed specifically for dynamic social and organizational systems (e.g., network analysis, system dynamics, social navigation). The resulting framework joins the science of epidemiology with the action agenda of community leaders, yielding an applied science capable of transforming social and physical conditions for generations to come.

Widening the Network

A widening circle of community advocates, researchers, health officials, and others is forming to discuss how a syndemic orientation can help create (or restore) the conditions that support safer, healthier people. Network membership is open to anyone with interest. General information is available to all, but only registered members can access work in progress, collaboration tools, and related resources. A brief registration form is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/syndemics>.

Network Members in the US*

