Health inequalities, social determinants, and surveillance

This presentation will seek to answer five questions:
What are inequalities and social determinants in public health?
Why do they matter?
What are the challenges in addressing these issues?
What is being covered or should be covered in surveillance systems?
What does the future hold regarding surveillance for these issues?
It begins by defining social determinants of health as the economic and social conditions that influence the health of individuals, communities, and jurisdictions as a whole. A wide range of variables may be included such as: the social gradient, stress, social exclusion/poverty, unemployment, social support, addiction, food, transport, and gender. In addition, social epidemiology is the branch of epidemiology that studies the social distribution and social determinants of states of health. And social changes and social movements seek collective action for societal change, while often changing political structures. The presentation will present challenges for surveillance to answer the following questions:
Do we adequately understand the social causes/evidence base?
Should we measure the causes vs. readiness for a social movement?
Does any of this lead to effective interventions and improvement in population health?
In answering these questions, examples with be drawn from the US Behavioral Risk Factors Surveillance System and the WHO Health for All data set. A short case study will be presented that focuses on housing. It is known that the spatial concentration of poverty has been shown to have an adverse effect on a range life experiences, from isolating families from employment opportunities to limiting youth to inferior education, dangerous neighborhood conditions, and harmful environmental conditions. To affect these issues adequate housing may have a direct or indirect impact on several health indicators.
The presentation will conclude with future issues of importance, including the need to:
Continue to develop the evidence base on social determinants and interventions
Further refine issues for surveillance
Foster international collaboration.

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