

**The Role of Public Health in
Mental Health**

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World Health Organization

“Health is a state of complete physical,
mental and social well-being and not
merely the absence of disease or
infirmity.”

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Public Health Agency of Canada

“Public health is part of every aspect
of our lives, from our homes to our
workplaces, and our schools to our
communities. It encompasses
everything we do ... Public health is
about the way we live.”

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- Social Justice
 - a key value in public health
- The mental burden of suffering injustice
- Mental illness among disadvantaged populations (depression, anxiety, etc.)

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The primary focus of clinical medicine:
treatment and care of the sick
("sickness care")

The primary focus of public health:
prevention and maintenance of
health rather than cure and
rehabilitation ("police function")

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Public health activities and strategies
may:

- (a) deliberately plan to reduce/relieve
mental illness
- (b) inadvertently cause/aggravate
mental illness

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Reduction of mental illness

The built environment:
Housing standards
Recreational space – town planning
Traditional aboriginal healers
Access to facilities – public transport

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Prevention of Harm (e.g. neurological, emotional, psychological)

- Road traffic safety – head injuries
- Safety, comfort, dignity etc. in the workplace
- Safety in the home
- Drinking water and food safety
- Addiction control / reduction

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Work-related stress

Work hours, employment equity, etc.
Employment training, e.g.

- First responders
- Military (P.T.S.D.)
- Health care workers

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Public health dysfunctions

- Domestic overcrowding (e.g. privacy, violence)
- Housing on Reserves
- Aboriginal healers, medications
- Homelessness
- Work travel

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...Public health dysfunctions ...

- “Environmental racism”
- Cultural alienation (immigrants, refugees)
- Unplanned urbanization
- Environmental degradation

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...Public health dysfunctions

- Imprisonment and mental health
- School bullying
- Poverty/Social Deprivation (slums)
- Access to care (e.g. psychotherapy)

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