

Social Cohesion—Its Role in Health Promotion and Health Policy, *Lessons from Latin America*

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Background

Increasing social cohesion is a strategy for addressing social disparities and is associated with better health outcomes. Globally, policy-makers and program developers have implemented social cohesion approaches with the goal of reducing inequities and improving health. Experiences from these global efforts can inform the development of policies and programming that promote social cohesion for addressing health disparities in the United States.

Aim

We aimed to assess how social cohesion is operationalized in Latin America and Europe to develop and implement programming and policies for improved health outcomes.

Methods

Through a review of peer-reviewed and gray literature, we identified social cohesion initiatives in Latin America and Europe. Within those initiatives, we focused on three programs, including one multi-country program, which took place in Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Germany. We conducted 17 in-depth, multi-sectoral interviews with key program stakeholders (i.e. funders, academics, program coordinators). Interviews were transcribed, translated, coded line-by-line, and major themes were identified.

Findings and Implications

Major operationalization themes for social cohesion included cross-sector collaboration, community engagement, and participatory policy development to address existing social and health issues. Another theme identified was the need for more academically rigorous and consistent operationalization, as well as evaluation of social cohesion programs and policies.

Steps that may promote social cohesion and help reduce health disparities in the U.S. include efforts by policy makers to engage various stakeholders in the development of policy and in the implementation of programs based on those policies. Further research is also needed to develop systematic methods for evaluating outcomes of social cohesion policies and programs.