

TAKING BETTER ACCOUNT OF SOCIAL INEQUALITIES IN HEALTH THE REFLEX-ISS TOOL

TAKING BETTER ACCOUNT OF SOCIAL INEQUALITIES IN HEALTH: THE REFLEX-ISS TOOL

“Observe, understand, and analyze an intervention to improve how social inequalities in health are taken into account”

This discussion tool is provided to your team so that members can think collectively about how to better take into account social inequalities in health (SIH) in their project, with the aim of reducing them, or at least not aggravating them. This discussion tool is not intended to measure the impact or the effectiveness of an intervention in reducing SIH; rather, its main objective is to open up dialogue on SIH. It complements other tools that you are likely to use to ensure the quality of your project. It will support your team in the process of identifying and analyzing strengths and elements to improve with respect to reducing social inequalities in health. It incorporates key strategies such as participation, action on social determinants of health, collaboration, intersectorality, and empowerment.

For whom?

Persons who plan, implement, evaluate, and ensure sustainability of public health projects, in collaboration with sectoral and intersectoral partners (e.g., ministries, school boards, municipalities, schools, community organizations).

How and when to use it?

There is no ‘right moment’ to use the tool, nor a required number of work sessions to complete it. It is presented in five sections that can be used independently, according to where you are with your project, whether at the point of conducting joint planning, adjusting an existing plan or intervention, implementing it, evaluating it, and/or planning for sustainability.

To begin, we suggest you identify at what stage your project is; then, for each discussion element of that stage, identify which of the five possible choices, from 0 to 4, best represents the level of progress in discussing and addressing that element. Here is a description of the five levels within which to situate your project's progress with regard to taking SIH into account:

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- (0) **“Not considered”**: means that the element has not been considered in the intervention, or that the team is not able to express its position with respect to this question. Discussion should be initiated!
- (1) **“Discussion initiated”**: means that the element has been discussed briefly and the thought process is still in an early stage. There is more work to be done!
- (2) **“Concrete measures proposed”**: indicates that the element has been discussed at length within the team, that concrete proposals are being reviewed, but that they now have to be carried out. All efforts must be concentrated on consolidating gains and working to achieve concrete measures!
- (3) **“Concrete measures undertaken”**: means that several concrete actions have been undertaken, but they are not yet sufficient to fulfill your action's full potential for reducing SIH. You are on the right path, only a bit more effort is needed!
- (4) **“Element accounted for”**: means that the element has been significantly taken into account in the actions implemented. Now you need to sustain what has been achieved!

Finally, in the section on the right, we invite you to provide comments explaining the identified level of progress as well as notes on contextual elements and specific measures taken. Once your analysis is completed, there is a reserved section at the end of the stage where you can record your assessment and suggestions for possible improvement.

At the end of the grid, there is a final section where you can record the overall assessment of the project and note paths for improvements to be pursued or undertaken.

Important considerations:

- Terms marked by an asterisk * are defined in the section “Definitions of useful terms and concepts for completing the grid,” provided in appendix. To reach it, you can click on the **“Glossary”** button ... and then to return, click on **“Back to page”**.
- The terms “project” and “intervention” are both used to refer to the action your team is conducting. Normally, the term **project** - and sometimes also “program” or “plan” - is used more often at a regional scale, while “intervention” is used at a local scale. Again, the tool is flexible: whether you consider your action to be a project or an intervention, the tool can be applied with equal relevance.
- If it is your first time using the tool, you can request support from a person who has a firm knowledge base concerning social determinants of health and SIH to help facilitate your team discussions.

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Project title:

Brief project description:

Project target
population*:

What subgroups* does the project target?:

Project development stages

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Work session time and place:

Team members present for the work session and each one's role in the project:

1. PROJECT PLANNING: elements to consider and address	Not considered	Discussion initiated	Concrete measures proposed	Concrete measures undertaken	Element accounted for	Not applicable	Reasoning, measures undertaken, and contextual elements
	0	1	2	3	4		

PROBLEM AND NEEDS ANALYSIS

Q1. The nature of the problem of **social inequalities in health*** (SIH) and the problems experienced by the different **target subgroups*** of the population concerned by the project have been clearly described and defined in the project.

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	0	1	2	3	4		

Q2. The context and the **social determinants*** likely to have an effect on identified SIH issues have been described.

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Q3. Different determinants have been investigated for each of the target subgroups of the population concerned by the intervention (e.g., age, sex, cultural background, level of education).

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Q4. The target subgroups have been identified using a description of the SIH problem that is based on different sources of information:

- theoretical knowledge/
explanatory models
- scientific knowledge
surveillance data
- advice from subject matter
experts/professionals

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Q5. The SIH problem description has taken into account the opinions of the different target subgroups of the population concerned by the intervention.

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Q6. The actors involved in the intervention share a similar vision of the context and SIH issues for each of the target subgroups

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ACTION OBJECTIVES, RATIONALE, AND DESIGN

Q7. The focus of the project and its activities target the social determinants of health at the root of the SIH identified.

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Q8. The intervention proposes an array of activities to address the different needs of the target subgroups of the concerned population, following the strategy of **proportionate universalism***.

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TAKING BETTER ACCOUNT OF SOCIAL INEQUALITIES IN HEALTH: THE REFLEX-ISS TOOL

1. PROJECT PLANNING: elements to consider and address	Not considered	Discussion initiated	Concrete measures proposed	Concrete measures undertaken	Element accounted for	Not applicable	Reasoning, measures undertaken, and contextual elements
	0	1	2	3	4		
Q9. The project's focus is specifically to reduce SIH	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Q10. The intervention objectives are consistent with the analysis of the SIH problem.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Q11. The methods and action strategies selected to reduce SIH are based on available best practices *.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Q12. Potential undesirable outcomes * for SIH have been anticipated.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

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INVOLVEMENT OF PARTNERS AND OF THE TARGET POPULATION

Q13. The main intersectoral partners concerned by the intervention have been involved from the beginning, at the planning stage.

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Q14. Field practitioners with specific experience in the area of fighting SIH have been involved from the beginning, at the planning stage.

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Q15. Persons from the different target subgroups have been involved from the beginning, at the planning stage.

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Q16. The various opinions, potentially opposing visions, and the power relationships between the different partners involved in the decision-making process surrounding SIH issues have been presented and discussed.

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Overall evaluation

Examine all of the replies and comments you have provided for this stage. Now, assign yourself an overall grade for the stage with respect to measures undertaken to better take SIH into account. Simply choose between green, yellow or red. As the yellow category is a particularly large one, it may be useful to identify potential improvements within this category. This grade will give you an idea of your project's SIH-gradient at this particular stage.



Stage assessment



Highest priority suggested improvements

According to the cultural and historical context of the target subgroups' environments, organizational contexts, your human and financial resources, and the values shared or not shared by the project stakeholders.

Suggested improvement 1

Lead person:

Timeframe:

Suggested improvement 2

Lead person:

Timeframe:

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2. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION: elements to consider and address	Not considered	Discussion initiated	Concrete measures proposed	Concrete measures undertaken	Element accounted for	Not applicable	Reasoning, measures undertaken, and contextual elements
	0	1	2	3	4		

ORGANIZATION AND STEERING OF ACTION

Q17. Measures have been deployed to encourage and equip intervention workers to reduce SIH.

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Q18. The proposed action takes into account the cultural and historical context of the environments to which target subgroups belong.

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Q19. **Incentive measures*** have been deployed to encourage the different target subgroups to participate in implementing the intervention.

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Q20. Work methods have been adopted that enable the team to take into account target subgroups' point of view and encourage their contribution.

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2. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION: elements to consider and address	Not considered	Discussion initiated	Concrete measures proposed	Concrete measures undertaken	Element accounted for	Not applicable	Reasoning, measures undertaken, and contextual elements
	0	1	2	3	4		

Q21. The roles, tasks, and responsibilities specific to SIH reduction have been clearly identified for all actors involved in the intervention.

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Q22. The lead person for the intervention as well as all team members have taken all possible steps to acquire sufficient knowledge so that they can confidently conduct activities intended to reduce SIH.

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Q23. The lead person for the intervention, the intervention workers, and partners have considered how to monitor for any potential undesirable outcomes, which could contribute to increasing or perpetuating SIH.

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LEADERSHIP

Q24. Leadership in areas related to SIH is shared between the different intervention stakeholders.

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2. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION: elements to consider and address	Not considered	Discussion initiated	Concrete measures proposed	Concrete measures undertaken	Element accounted for	Not applicable	Reasoning, measures undertaken, and contextual elements
	0	1	2	3	4		

Q25. The lead person for the intervention is aware of SIH and provides leadership to engage stakeholders in reducing SIH.

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ACTION ADAPTABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Q26. The intervention processes, particularly the communication tools, are adapted to the **literacy*** level of each target subgroup.

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Q27. Mechanisms have been deployed to facilitate the participation of the target subgroups and to adapt to the following constraints: Physical accessibility, Geographic accessibility, Financial accessibility, Action acceptability

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Q28. Potential sources of **stigmatization*** and discrimination have been taken into account.

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Overall evaluation

Examine all of the replies and comments you have provided for this stage. Now, assign yourself an overall grade for the stage with respect to measures undertaken to better take SIH into account. Simply choose between green, yellow or red. As the yellow category is a particularly large one, it may be useful to identify potential improvements within this category. This grade will give you an idea of your project's SIH-gradient at this particular stage.



Stage assessment



Highest priority suggested improvements

According to the cultural and historical context of the target subgroups' environments, organizational contexts, your human and financial resources, and the values shared or not shared by the project stakeholders.

Suggested improvement 1

Lead person:

Timeframe:

Suggested improvement 2

Lead person:

Timeframe:

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3.EMPOWERMENT: elements to consider and address	Not considered	Discussion initiated	Concrete measures proposed	Concrete measures undertaken	Element accounted for	Not applicable	Reasoning, measures undertaken, and contextual elements
	0	1	2	3	4		

Q29. The intervention aims to strengthen the **empowerment*** of target subgroups.

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Q30. Activities have been undertaken to improve competencies, participation, self-esteem, and/or critical awareness among the target subgroups, thus enabling them to take action on what matters to them by participating in this project.

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Overall evaluation

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Stage assessment



Highest priority suggested improvements

According to the cultural and historical context of the target subgroups' environments, organizational contexts, your human and financial resources, and the values shared or not shared by the project stakeholders.

Suggested improvement 1

Lead person:

Timeframe:

Suggested improvement 2

Lead person:

Timeframe:

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4. EVALUATION: elements to consider and address	Not considered	Discussion initiated	Concrete measures proposed	Concrete measures undertaken	Element accounted for	Not applicable	Reasoning, measures undertaken, and contextual elements
	0	1	2	3	4		

EVALUATION PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Q31. The provisions for monitoring implementation of the intervention include specific monitoring of actions concerning SIH.

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Q32. An evaluation plan targeting SIH-related actions in particular has been developed from the initial planning stage of the intervention.

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Q33. The partners involved in the project have helped design and carry out the evaluation plan, which focuses on SIH reduction in particular.

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4. EVALUATION: elements to consider and address	Not considered	Discussion initiated	Concrete measures proposed	Concrete measures undertaken	Element accounted for	Not applicable	Reasoning, measures undertaken, and contextual elements
	0	1	2	3	4		

Q34. Persons from the different target subgroups affected by the intervention have participated in designing and carrying out the evaluation plan, which focuses on SIH reduction in particular.

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Q35. The data collection methods (e. g. tools, approach, questionnaires) are adapted to the different levels of literacy of the respondents surveyed for the evaluation.

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EVALUATION RESULTS

Q36. The evaluation assesses the intervention's capacity to reduce SIH.

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4. EVALUATION: elements to consider and address	Not considered	Discussion initiated	Concrete measures proposed	Concrete measures undertaken	Element accounted for	Not applicable	Reasoning, measures undertaken, and contextual elements
	0	1	2	3	4		
Q37. The evaluation includes indicators for determining the intervention's effects on the different target subgroups.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Q38. The evaluation looks at potential undesirable effects of the intervention that might generate, increase, or perpetuate SIH.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Q39. The recommendations issued following the evaluation include adjustments to be made to the project with respect to reducing SIH.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

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4. EVALUATION: elements to consider and address	Not considered	Discussion initiated	Concrete measures proposed	Concrete measures undertaken	Element accounted for	Not applicable	Reasoning, measures undertaken, and contextual elements
	0	1	2	3	4		

Q40. The recommendations issued following the evaluation involved the different partners, including persons in the target subgroups.

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Q41. There is a procedure for monitoring long-term effects to see whether or not the benefits or results of the intervention that affect SIH are maintained.

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Overall evaluation

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Stage assessment



Highest priority suggested improvements

According to the cultural and historical context of the target subgroups' environments, organizational contexts, your human and financial resources, and the values shared or not shared by the project stakeholders.

Suggested improvement 1

Lead person:

Timeframe:

Suggested improvement 2

Lead person:

Timeframe:

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5. SUSTAINABILITY elements to consider and address	Not considered	Discussion initiated	Concrete measures proposed	Concrete measures undertaken	Element accounted for	Not applicable	Reasoning, measures undertaken, and contextual elements
	0	1	2	3	4		
Q42. Actions favouring sustainability of activities and of their effects on reducing SIH have been planned since the project planning stage.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Q43. Steps have been planned or taken to stabilize organizational resources dedicated to intervention activities targeting SIH reduction.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Q44. The functioning of the organization leading the intervention has been adjusted to enable it to take SIH into account more easily.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

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Overall evaluation

Examine all of the replies and comments you have provided for this stage. Now, assign yourself an overall grade for the stage with respect to measures undertaken to better take SIH into account. Simply choose between green, yellow or red. As the yellow category is a particularly large one, it may be useful to identify potential improvements within this category. This grade will give you an idea of your project's SIH-gradient at this particular stage.



Stage assessment



Highest priority suggested improvements

According to the cultural and historical context of the target subgroups' environments, organizational contexts, your human and financial resources, and the values shared or not shared by the project stakeholders.

Suggested improvement 1

Lead person:

Timeframe:

Suggested improvement 2

Lead person:

Timeframe:

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT SOCIAL INEQUALITIES IN HEALTH: THE REFLEX-ISS TOOL

Overall team assessment
with respect to SIH



Remarks



Suggested improvements

Project planning



Project implementation



Empowerment



Evaluation



Sustainability



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Definitions of terms and concepts useful for completing the grid

Social inequalities in health

Social inequalities in health refer to the disparities in health associated with social advantages or disadvantages (e.g., income, schooling, social inclusion). These disparities are unjust and avoidable, and it is possible to mitigate them. Social inequalities in health are distributed according to a social gradient. The terms “social inequalities in health” and “health inequities” are sometimes used interchangeably (http://nccdh.ca/images/uploads/Glossary_EN_Feb_26.pdf). The social gradient implies a continuum, that is, that individuals' state of health correlates with their socioeconomic status (for example their level of education or of income). Social gradient serves to describe the phenomenon by which those at the top of the social pyramid enjoy better health than those directly beneath them, who in turn are healthier than those below, and so on, all the way to the bottom levels (Guide INPES, 2010 <http://www.inpes.sante.fr/CFESBases/catalogue/pdf/1333.pdf>).

Target population and target subgroups

An intervention's target population consists of subgroups that can be distinguished from each other for the purposes of adapting the action to each one. To be effective, an intervention must plan activities for each of the target subgroups. This means notably that not all target subgroups will be addressed in the same way, as they vary by language, level of education, socioeconomic level, etc. For example, an intervention targeting the children in neighbourhood x must address the different needs of the target subgroups identified, such as children 0 -5 years old in migrant families, children in single-parent families, or children in families within middle-level socioeconomic groups. Thus, an intervention aiming to reduce social inequalities in health will not try to reach only the poorest, but rather all of the various groups within the concerned population affected by the health issue, all along the social gradient, while modulating the intervention's intensity according to socioeconomic level and needs.

Empowerment

Empowerment is a process or an approach that aims to help individuals, communities, or organizations have greater power to act and take decisions on the important aspects of their life, and have greater influence on their environment. For the purposes of developing this discussion tool, the framework proposed by Ninacs, outlined below, has been used to define empowerment (Ninacs, W., 2003). Individual empowerment occurs on four levels: participation, competencies, self-esteem, and critical awareness.

- Participation manifests progressively, from silent participation to exercising the right to speak (including the right to refuse to speak), followed by the right to be heard, and culminating in the right to participate in decision-making. Participation also refers to a growing capacity to contribute and to take responsibility for one's participation, which involves the capacity to act rationally and the willingness to become engaged.
- Competencies include the knowledge and skills necessary for participation, on the one hand, and execution of the action on the other. They can involve both the acquisition of new skills and the re-evaluation of skills already possessed. Self-esteem leads individuals to perceive that they have the capacity to act to achieve personal or collective objectives.- Critical awareness represents the development of a collective conscience (the individual is not the only one with a problem), a social awareness that assuages individual feelings of guilt through the realization that individual or collective problems are influenced by the way in which society is organized. The culmination of critical awareness is political awareness and the acceptance of personal responsibility for change (the solution to structural problems depends on social change, that is, political action).

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Social determinants of health

Social determinants of health are interdependent social, political, economic, and cultural factors that generate the conditions in which individuals are born, live, grow up, learn, work, have fun, and grow old. Interaction between social determinants of health transforms and changes them over time and over life periods, affecting the health of individuals and groups in different ways. Inequitable distribution of social determinants of health among social groups is at the root of the establishment and perpetuation of social inequalities in health within a country or between various countries. (http://nccdh.ca/images/uploads/Glossary_EN_Feb_26.pdf)

Proportionate universalism

This approach consists in offering the entire population a certain number of universal services, and then intensifying action to address the specific needs of persons, depending on the difficulties they are facing (Marmot Review (2012). Fair society, healthy lives: Strategic review of health inequalities in England post-2010). Thus, the approach does not focus on only the poorest people.

Best practices

Best practices are activities based on sound scientific evidence, extensive community experience, and cultural knowledge. They also refer to interventions developed based on recognized criteria to increase their potential effectiveness. Health-centred interventions will be more effective if based on established best practices. (<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/ipchls-spimmvs/glossary-glossaire-eng.php>)

Incentive measures

Incentive measures are intended to motivate subgroups to participate, e.g., through certified training, financial compensation, meals offered to participants, participation certificates, provision of daycare, reimbursement of travel costs.

Undesirable outcomes

Unforeseen consequences that go against the intended goal, e.g., increasing social inequalities in health, increasing stigmatization, deterioration in the target group(s) state of health, negative change in attitude of the general population or of certain actors with respect to the target subgroup(s).

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Health literacy

Health literacy is “the ability to access, comprehend, evaluate, and communicate information as a way to promote, maintain and improve health in a variety of settings across the life-course.” According to the Intersectoral Approach to Improving Health Literacy for Canadians, a health literate individual is able to: 1) understand and carry out instructions for self-care, including administering complex daily medical regimens, 2) plan and achieve the lifestyle adjustments required for improved health, 3) make informed positive health-related decisions, 4) know how and when to access health care, 5) share health promoting activities with others, and 6) address health issues in the community and society. (http://www.cpha.ca/uploads/progs/literacy/examples_e.pdf)

Intervention acceptability

The result of a process through which the parties involved jointly establish the minimal conditions required for a project, program, or policy to be adopted in a harmonious and timely way, in its natural and human setting. It also refers to the need to act while respecting the cultural context and history of the intervention's setting. (http://www.cpeq.org/files/guides/guide_bonnespratiques_web.pdf, p.2)

Stigmatization

Behaviours, life habits, life conditions, or other personal characteristics are linked to a moral judgment that defines illnesses or ill people as either “good” or “bad”. The stigmatization process is based, among other things, on the idea that persons are responsible for their problem or illness, at least in part, and therefore deserve to be blamed given their behaviour. In this way, individuals who smoke, drink alcohol, eat rich foods, or have unprotected sexual relations are judged negatively and blamed when their health is affected or even just because it could be affected. (http://www.inspq.qc.ca/pdf/publications/1637_DimensionEthiqueStigmatisation_OutilAideReflexion.pdf)