

**Establishing healthy, sustainable communities:
The health benefits of social capital**

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Abstract

Although social capital emerged as a contemporary concept throughout the 1980s, the foundation of social capital, established as the importance of social connections and community membership, was first acknowledged during the 19th Century. Within the last two decades, research related to social capital and health has rapidly emerged to identify significant associations related to individual and community health issues and behaviors. More specifically, the health literature related to social capital has expanded to include research related to physical, mental, and self-rated health as well as all-cause mortality.

In some cases, social capital has been associated as a protective factor against diabetes and obesity as well as lower levels of depression. Furthermore, higher levels of happiness and wellbeing have been reported amongst communities that encourage social participation and minimize social isolation amongst members. Additionally, communities with increased levels of social participation and membership tend to report better self-rated health and lower rates of all-cause mortality. While much of the health literature related to social capital continues to grow, it is important to understand the role of social connections and participation in establishing healthy, sustainable communities.