

Social Capital

Social capital is broadly defined as the norms of reciprocity, interpersonal trust, solidarity and cooperation that are formed as a result of social networks and civic engagement. Social capital is what can be considered a determinant of health, having the power to undermine or improve mental and physical health. Measured at both the community and individual level, higher levels of social capital have been found to have a positive impact on health, and have been shown to reduce stressful conditions, risky behaviors and psychological distress.

Applying Smart Growth principles in development efforts automatically increases a community's opportunity to build social capital. The different aspects that make up social capital are supported by different built environments. Mixed-use environments have the effect of increasing interaction between individuals by facilitating access to services without having to use an automobile. Building compact neighborhoods, encouraging growth in existing communities, preserving open and green spaces, and fostering neighborhood identity are all principles of smart growth that have positive impacts on the formation of community networks and connectedness within communities.

Case Studies

- [Cortes Island, British Columbia Canada](#)
 - This case study demonstrates how members of a community came together with planners to make recommendations for improvements in their community based strongly on Smart Growth principles
- [Unnatural Causes Documentary Series](#)
 - This documentary contains evidence of the social determinants of health. Below are some specific clips that relate social capital to health outcomes:
 - [Impact of poverty and stress on diabetes among Native Americans](#)
 - [Cultural Loss- Impact on Native American Health](#)
 - [Place Matters](#)

Other Resources

- [Harvard University's Saguaro Seminar: Civic Engagement in America](#)
 - This website provides an overview of social capital, tools for measuring social capital, and contains links to the Harvard's current research.
- [The World Bank's Tools for Measuring Social Capital](#)
 - This resource contains an integrated quantitative/qualitative tool for measuring social capital at the community and organizational levels. It also contains a further breakdown of the elements of

social capital and provides examples of their role in building communities.

- [Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey](#)
 - This site contains results from a survey of 30,000 Americans that examined levels of social capital in a number of different communities throughout the country.
- [Applying the energy of the public health system to the built environment](#)
 - This presentation given by Wisconsin's Health department at a Seattle Bike/Walk conference examines the relationships between public health and the built environment and specifically discusses social capital in the context of public health and community development.