Module Subject: Structural Competency

Included in This Module:
1. PowerPoint slides with lecture notes
2. Activity guide for instructors
3. Discussion guide for instructors
4. Additional resources for learning more about structural competency

Module Goals:
- Introduce the concept of "structural competency."
- Explain what "structures" are and explain how they impact overall health, as well as mental health.
- Offer several person-centered vignettes to demonstrate the concept of "structural competency."
- Help students understand that health and mental health are not completely within a person's control – outside factors impact people in major ways, both negatively and positively.

Estimated Time to Complete Module: 20-25 minutes

Lecture notes are in the Notes section of the provided PowerPoint.

Activity Guide for Instructors: Small–Group Discussion

Note: This activity is to be used in conjunction with the lecture slides, and should be conducted during the lecture.

The **goal** of this activity is to give students a safe space to discuss structural factors that may exacerbate mental health issues, and identify barriers that prevent individuals from seeking or receiving effective help.

Slides 13-15 introduce a vignette and walk students through a small-group discussion activity.

1. On Slide 13, students are given limited information about a fictional person, "Margo:"
   - 46 years old
   - Divorced
   - Mother of two
   - Three-month history of depressive symptoms, including low mood, insomnia, and poor appetite (with weight loss)

2. Ask students to get into pairs or small groups (3 or 4 students), and discuss the following questions:
   - **What are three structural factors or barriers** that may contribute to Margo's mental health issues, or may prevent her from seeking/receiving the care she prefers?
   - **What is one structural or social factor** that could help Margo with her treatment and recovery?

3. Convene the students into a large group and ask each individual group to share something they talked about.
   a. Remember: We're talking about *structural* factors here (government programs, economic policies, non-profit and community organizations, public safety rules or norms, etc.), so sway students away from *cultural* responses (different ideas about family and social support, varying norms about seeking help, etc.)

4. Slide 15 provides some ideas about structural issues that may be influencing Margo's life, as well as structures that can help her recover from mental health issues.

Discussion Guide For Instructors

Note: You can expand this module with a full-class discussion, or assign a take-home reflective essay, using the following questions.

- Think about the "upside-down" pyramid of structure (pictured below); try to name one factor from at least two different sections that has influenced <u>your</u> mental health, your overall health, or the way you perceive and talk about mental health.
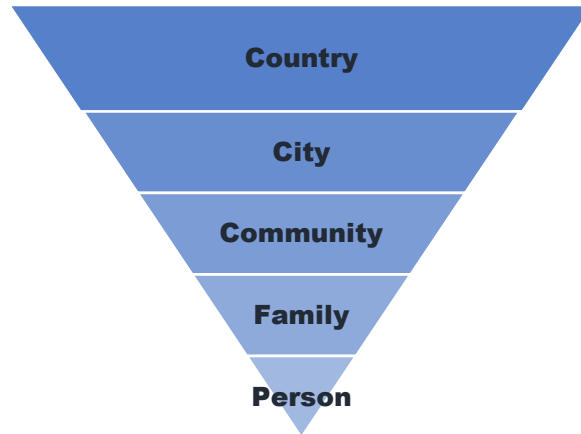
- Explain the difference between *cultural competency* and *structural competency*. Why is it important to know the difference? Which do you believe you are stronger in?

- What is one (realistic) way you could develop or sharpen your structural competency?

If you are interested to learn more about structural competency, see the following (free) resources:

- Pickett & Wilkinson (2010). Inequality: A underacknowledged source of mental illness and distress. *British Journal of Psychiatry, 197*, 426-428. Click here for PDF.

- StructComp.org. The Structural Competency Working Group is comprised of healthcare workers, scholars, public health professionals, students, educators, and other community members. Founded in the San Francisco Bay Area in 2014, our goal is to help promote the training of health professionals in structural competency around the country and beyond. Toward this end, they develop and disseminate open-use structural competency curricula.

- World Health Organization (2014): *Social Determinants of Mental Health* . This downloadable PDF (54 pages, three languages) outlines the interacting forces that shape individual and collective levels of mental health and well-being, and sets out actions that can be pursued to promote and protect good mental health. It is written in approachable language.