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SOCIAL CAPITAL AND PUBLIC HEALTH: RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Social capital is an economic idea that refers to the connections between individuals and entities that can be economically valuable. Social networks that include people who trust and assist each other can be a powerful asset. These relationships between individuals and companies can lead to a state in which each thinks of the other when something needs to be done.

Along with economic capital, social capital is a valuable mechanism in economic growth. As technological advancements continue to make the world smaller and the global population more interconnected, companies rely on social capital more than ever to drive business. While in decades past, companies could rely on persuasive marketing to get customers in the door, in the 21st century, those customers are plugging into social networks and relying on their peers to direct them to a provider when a business need arises.

As countries continue to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of ensuring that fair and equal access to healthcare for all is more urgent than ever. Policies that promote social capital building along all levels of society may offer an important avenue for improved healthcare delivery and health systems strengthening in the COVID-19 response.

The global response to COVID-19 has required decisiveness, resilience, and resolve from governments around the world. However, economic, legal, technological, geographic, and cultural barriers can limit the ability of a government to effectively respond to critical public health needs. The intricate network of stakeholders that operate within and interconnect with the public health space is an essential component

of a health system's response. In this context, considerations of social capital emerge as a powerful frame of reference for understanding how health interventions may be best implemented to effectively ensure an inclusive extension of health services for all members of society. It is patently clear that if a population group is excluded from accessing the health system and its attendant services and products, the efficacy of any pandemic response or recovery program may be severely undermined.

As countries adopt urgent public health measures in response to the many challenges posed by COVID-19, lessons learned from public health intervention studies that link enhanced social capital with improved mental health outcomes, greater community buy-in, and the extension of health services to vulnerable populations suggest a critical role for social capital in ensuring a rapid adjustment to today's new public health reality.

References

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