

SECOND EDITION

Health Behavior Theory for Public Health

Principles, Foundations, and Applications

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Dedications:

To my three girls, Gina, Sahara, and Sianna. You are my Love, my Joy, my Passion, my Hope, and my Life. RJD

To my wonderful and inspiring co-authors whose friendship, support, and mentorship mean the world to me and whose dedication and contribution to public health are an inspiration to all. LFS

This book is dedicated to the next generation of public health professionals – the future of this profession, and the people it serves, are in your hands. RAC

Special Dedication:

James W. Curran, MD, MPH

Dean, Rollins School of Public Health, Emory University

To a friend, colleague, and public health leader. You have made an indelible footprint on the landscape of public health. Your leadership, passion, and scholarship are widely respected and an inspiration for all of us fortunate to serve with you in your effort to champion a public health of consequence.



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Foreword

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Theory is essential in understanding health behaviors and is critical in guiding health research. Theory helps us organize and understand information; it focuses attention on key issues; and it helps us select constructs for questionnaires. Theory is fundamental in designing, implementing, and evaluating interventions and in constructing policies to improve health and prevent disease. Thus, theory is essential to the work of public health.

Health behaviors are influenced by factors related to the individual but are also shaped by the myriad of social and structural influences. For example, to understand adolescent contraceptive use, drug use, smoking, and drinking patterns, one needs to understand the origins of these behaviors and the social and environmental forces supporting them. Physicians who work in public health and address human behavior are well aware of this importance; while medicine is principally guided by a variety of biological theories, physicians rapidly come to understand that effective pharmacologic interventions often fail unless they address the behaviors of patients. Public health professionals intuitively grasp the importance of behavior change in influencing behaviors across the lifespan—from adolescent pregnancy prevention, to injury prevention and prevention of chronic disease, to promoting healthy aging.

The “new public health” focuses on health promotion and the factors that enable individuals and communities to attain optimal health (Awofeso, 2004). In this new era, social education, and economic actions are provided to support attitudinal, behavioral, and social change. For example, health behavior theory has been highly influential in human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) prevention and treatment over the past 30 years, although the focus of interventions and the specifics of health behavior theory have shifted over time. In the early years of the HIV pandemic, behavioral risk reduction—coupled with latex condoms and clean needles—was the only public health tool for prevention of new HIV infection (Lyles et al., 2007). With the advent of highly effective pharmacologic treatments, the new behavioral challenge became encouraging adherence to drug regimens. And when we discovered that effective pharmacologic treatment could be an effective HIV prevention strategy (so-called “treatment as prevention” approach, Cohen, McCauley, & Gamble, 2012), we realized again that behavioral change was essential to the success of this new biomedical strategy.

In my field, adolescent health, understanding the origins of and influences on health risk behaviors is critical to effective health promotion. A recent *Lancet* Commission report outlined the triple dividend of investing in adolescent health: improving the health adolescents today, across the lifespan, and for the next generation (Patton et al., 2016). These investments need to address the social and structural factors (Viner et al., 2012) that influence adolescent risk behaviors. Behavioral theory is essential to understanding these social forces and promoting adolescent health and well-being.

Health Behavior Theory for Public Health, Second Edition addresses the need to provide students with a highly accessible (easy to understand) collection of basic “tools” needed to design, implement, and evaluate health promotion programs. The most essential of these tools is an accurate understanding of the tenets and constructs comprising commonly used behavioral and social science theories. The selection of theories is carefully balanced to provide students with the diverse skill sets that are needed to design effective health promotion programs.

In this new edition, all chapters have been updated and refined to improve the student learning experience—and new chapters added. All chapters also now contain pull quotes to highlight key points relevant to the chapter objectives. Chapter 9 on ecological strategies has been greatly augmented by adding two key theories commonly used to help resolve social inequalities: minority stress theory and intersectionality theory. The authors have updated applied examples, with one featuring the highly successful structural-level of intervention of Citibike in New York City and a second illustrating an ecological intervention in a campus-based violence prevention program. A new chapter (Chapter 13) teaches students the value of combining multiple theories to better understand—and thus better resolve—social inequalities in preventing disease. Using Intervention Mapping as the framework, this chapter provides an efficient set of practices that can be vital to public health professionals who are faced with challenges not easily addressed by the use of one theory in isolation.

Finally, the three authors of this revised text (Ralph, Rick, and Laura) are among the “best of the best”, superb social and behavioral scientists who have devoted years to improving health via theory-driven, innovative public health interventions. Their life’s work has been dedicated to health promotion. Their thinking in this new edition is very much aligned with modern thinking about ecological influences. Moreover, because it is an authored text, there is strong integration of the chapters. Visuals, margin quotes, learning objectives, practice questions, make the text a unified learning experience. With this second edition, they have created a “one-stop shop” to prepare the next generation of public health professionals to carry on the important work of behavior change.

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Prologue

Health promotion is a cornerstone of public health practice. In turn, the primary task of health promotion involves leveraging and sustaining long-term health-protective behaviors across diverse populations. Meeting the very difficult challenges inherent in fostering health-protective behaviors requires the wise and parsimonious use of behavioral and social science theories. These theories can best be viewed as the tools of the trade, and this text is designed to help you master those all-so-important tools. Before you begin this learning process, it is crucial that you understand a basic principle: learning about the full array of currently used theories in health promotion practice is essential to the ultimate success of any public health program you may design and implement. In many ways, your work in health promotion is similar to that of a highly skilled craftsperson. You will be crafting interventions and it is unlikely that any two programs will be “built” in the same way. This is true because even if you plan to change the same behavior in a subsequent program, the population served by that program is bound to be markedly different than the population originally served by the same program. So, think of yourself as a craftsperson who can effectively assess the needs of any population relative to their long-term adoption of health-protective behaviors. Your theory “toolbox” will facilitate this assessment and it will also allow you to develop an effective intervention approach.

Another important preliminary lesson is that each of the theories in your toolbox may, at first blush, appear to be distinctively different. As you read this text, rest assured that the theories you learn about each have a unique role in changing

health behavior. Learning about and using only a few of the many theories is unlikely to lead to successful health promotion programs. Similarly, learning about theory in the absence of learning about core practices such as measurement, evaluation, and planning will not be adequate if your goal is to truly have an impact on population health. As such, the second edition of *Health Behavior Theory for Public Health* will provide you with a balanced professional education—one that teaches you about the essential spectrum of theoretical tools as well as the core practices.

This text will open by providing you with a firm foundation (Section I) for developing expertise in public health theory and related core practices. Please pay special attention to the concepts and terminology, as this added effort will certainly pay great dividends in your career. Section I is focused on health, public health, health behavior, and health promotion planning, rather than theory per se. Indeed, you will learn in this section that there is much more to understanding and changing health behavior than simply being well-versed in theory.

Section II provides you with the ability to gain a command of the theories and approaches most commonly applied in public health research and programs. We have taken great strides to present this material in a very straightforward manner and within the context of current relevant challenges in the field. As you finish this section you will see how theory “fits” into the larger scope of public health research and practice as described in Section I.

The text will close by providing you with a diverse set of application “tools” (Section III). These fairly advanced chapters were designed to

bring all that you have learned in Section I and Section II into a more practical light. Here, you will learn about the essential tasks of translation, learning to combine theories, measurement, and program evaluation. Again, we emphasize the point that understanding and changing health behavior is challenging and requires multiple skills beyond the ability to apply theory.

Finally, we invite you to use an evaluative eye as you read this text. By using this phrase, we are suggesting that you should avoid the academic trap of looking at ideas as being correct or incorrect. Instead, think of each new idea as an opportunity to indulge in critical thinking. When learning about various theories or core practices, you may want to ask yourself questions such as “Is this approach logical and can it be reasonably translated into practice?” Learn to think in terms that transcend the universal terms of correct or

incorrect and challenge yourself to think about questions such as, “When would this approach work best and when would it work poorly, or not at all?”

Our goal for the next generation of public health professionals is for them to develop effective programs designed to avoid premature morbidity and mortality. We recognize that this work is as important as the work of traditional medical professionals and that effective public health programs can make a difference that transcends the limitation of a medical paradigm. This text will provide you a broad acumen of knowledge and skills that will ultimately serve your needs in the work you do to advance health promotion practice. We trust that your dedication to preventing disease will become greater than ever as you gain the ability to truly have an impact on the lives of others.

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