

Introducing the Optimal Health Model

The mission of the Office of Population Affairs (OPA), in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is to promote health across the reproductive lifespan through innovative, evidence-based adolescent health and family planning programs, services, strategic partnerships, evaluation, and research. A fundamental aspect of achieving this mission involves the integration of the concept of optimal health into OPA projects and initiatives.

What is optimal health?

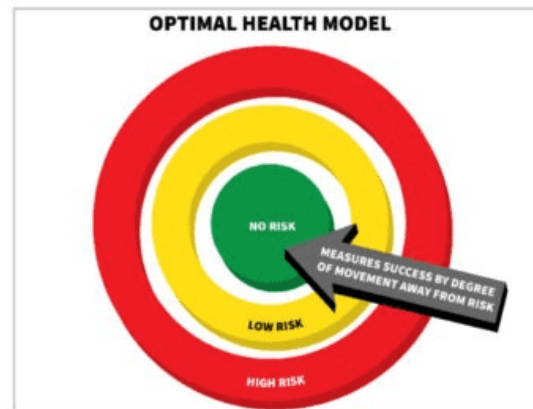
“Optimal health is a dynamic balance of physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and intellectual health...Lifestyle change can be facilitated through a combination of learning experiences that enhance awareness, increase motivation, and build skills and, most important, through the creation of opportunities that open access to environments that make positive health practices the easiest choice.”¹

Optimal Health Model

The **Optimal Health Model** prioritizes prevention through policies following these steps:

- ▶ Identify the health concern
- ▶ Identify the risk factors that influence that health concern
- ▶ Respond with an intervention that promotes the best possible health outcome for the population
- ▶ Encourage individuals to make appropriate changes that will lead them towards a position of increasingly lower risk

The model is adaptable to a range of risk behaviors and diseases, and measures success by the degree of movement away from risk. This aspirational public health model can help transform the health conversation and promote optimal health for all.



How do we apply an optimal health model approach to high risk behaviors?

We talk about population health as applying universal strategies to **prevent illness and/or behaviors** before they are initiated. Public health strategies typically fall into three categories: primary prevention or risk avoidance, secondary intervention or risk reduction, and treatment. Avoiding risk is optimal or preferred to reducing risk, and primary prevention can lead to health outcomes that are generally improved when behavioral risks are avoided. Public health advocates should encourage the development of the skills necessary to make healthy choices and avoid risky behaviors, or if currently engaged in those behaviors, to change the behaviors and avoid them in the future. These healthy choices help move them towards optimal

¹ O'Donnell, M. P. (2009). Definition of Health Promotion 2.0: Embracing Passion, Enhancing Motivation, Recognizing Dynamic Balance, and Creating Opportunities. *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 24(1), iv-iv. doi:10.4278/ajhp.24.1.iv



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