



Editor's Notes

Definition of Health Promotion 2.0: Embracing Passion, Enhancing Motivation, Recognizing Dynamic Balance, and Creating Opportunities

Several months ago, I shared my draft of a tentative revision to the *American Journal of Health Promotion's* definition of health promotion.¹ We use this definition to guide the editorial content of the *Journal*. The revised wording builds on definitions we published in 1986 and 1989.^{2,3} I asked our readers for feedback on the revised definition. The reactions were mixed. Some readers discouraged me from revising a succinct definition that has gained wide use. Others embraced the new concepts expressed in the revised definition. Several readers sent suggestions on how to improve clarity. I drew on all these comments in crafting the definition herein. I hope this rendition lasts at least another decade.

This new definition is intended to stress the following seven points. The first three were addressed in our original definitions. The final four are new to this revised definition. (1) The work we do is part science and part art. The science emerges from research, and the art emerges from intuition, experience, and listening. (2) Health is multidimensional. We could list 3, 5, 7, or 20 dimensions. This definition focuses on five dimensions, with the hope of achieving a balance between inclusive scope and parsimony. (3) The physical and social environments in which we live are probably the most important predictors of health behaviors. (4) The greatest contribution we can make at the cognitive level is helping motivate people to strive for optimal health. Enhancing skills on how to practice healthy lifestyles is also very important. Enhancing knowledge or awareness on the links between health behaviors and health outcomes is only

moderately important. (5) Health is a means, not an end, for most people. People will be motivated to enhance their health if they discover how enhancing their health will help them focus on their passions. (6) Optimal health is not a static point that we either achieve or do not achieve. It is a dynamic condition that changes with life circumstances. (7) We may be more successful if we think of our work from the perspective of the people we serve, rather than on what we do. For example, creating opportunities for people to gain access to supportive environments helps the people we serve more than just creating supportive environments.

The new definition is below.

Health Promotion is the art and science of helping people discover the synergies between their core passions and optimal health, enhancing their motivation to strive for optimal health, and supporting them in changing their lifestyle to move toward a state of 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.

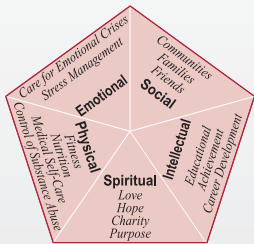
Michael O'Donnell

Michael P. O'Donnell, PhD, MBA, MPH

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2. O'Donnell MP. Definition of health promotion, part II: levels of programs. *Am J Health Promot.* 1986;1:6-9.
3. O'Donnell MP. Definition of health promotion, part III: expanding the definition. *Am J Health Promot.* 1989;3:5.

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DIMENSIONS OF OPTIMAL HEALTH

Definition of Health Promotion

“Health Promotion is the science and art of helping people change their lifestyle to move toward a state of optimal health. Optimal health is defined as a balance of physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual health. Lifestyle change can be facilitated through a combination of efforts to enhance awareness, change behavior and create environments that support good health practices. Of the three, supportive environments will probably have the greatest impact in producing lasting change.”

(O'Donnell, *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 1989, 3(3):5.)

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