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## Empowerment, practices and strategies



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*... partner for healthy community development*

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## Empowerment in the context of health

The most effective empowerment strategies are those that build on and reinforce authentic participation ensuring autonomy in decision-making, sense of community and bonding, and psychological empowerment of the community members themselves

Empowerment strategies, including community-wide participation, need to be integrated into local, regional and national policies and economic, legal, and human rights initiatives.

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## **Patient empowerment strategies**

Patient or consumer empowerment has emerged in the last decades as a proactive partnership and patient self-care strategy to improve health outcomes and quality of life among the chronically ill.

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# Empowerment interventions

- support groups
  - educational opportunities
  - caregiver empowerment
  - patient decision-making
  - changes in health care services and advocacy efforts
    - enhanced satisfaction with provider/patient relationships
    - better access and efficient use of health services
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# Health outcomes in patient empowerment

## **Directly:**

- through improvements in individual decision-making efficacy, disease complication management and improved health behaviours

## **Indirectly**

- through strengthened support groups, caregiver empowerment, enhanced satisfaction with provider/patient relationships and better access and efficient use of health services, with evidence of reduced utilization, enhanced self-education and improved mental health outcomes.
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## **Family empowerment**

Family empowerment strategies have increased caregiver efficacy, coping skills and access and effective use of health services.

Family strategies have seen greatest use in mental health, including reduced anxiety and depression in caring for chronically ill children.

Support group interventions with grandparents and a systematic review of 20 studies of parent training to improve maternal psychosocial health showed reduced depression, anxiety and enhanced empowerment.

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# Mental health

Mental health empowerment programmes that focus on advocacy place the patients in helping roles, which enhances their social support and quality of life and can create policy and practice changes such as improved quality of recreation services, new respite facilities, coalitions against stigma, and consumer rights policies.

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## **Empowerment of people at risk for HIV/AIDS**

Participatory research, using indigenous knowledge and peers from the community, has been shown to improve outreach and to create community ownership of programmes.

HIV/AIDS prevention empowerment strategies that address gender inequities have improved health status by increasing condom use and reducing HIV infection rates.

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## **Women and maternal health**

Integrated efforts that include reproductive health, family planning, maternal and child health, with income-generating activities, literacy, and primary health care have increased project implementation.

An integrated child nutrition programme empowering women to share information, and learn problem-solving and child care skills in women's supportive environments improved children's food intake and reduced severe malnutrition.

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# Empowerment strategies

**Integrate** the following effective shown empowerment strategies into overall health promotion strategies:

- a) increasing citizens' skills, access to information and resources,
  - b) using small group efforts to enhance critical consciousness and build supportive environments and a deeper sense of community,
  - c) promoting community action through collective involvement in decision-making and participation in all phases of planning, implementation and evaluation, use of lay helpers/leaders, advocacy and leadership training, and organizational and coalition capacity development,
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## Empowerment strategies

- d) strengthening healthy public policy through organizational and inter-organizational actions, transfer of decision-making authority to participants of interventions and promoting/demanding transparency and accountability of government and other institutions and
  - e) having community members define and act on community needs, including as health consumers;
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# Empowerment strategies

**Build** on documented successful strategies for marginalized populations

(e.g., youth, those at risk for HIV/AIDS, women, and the poor), and supporting partnerships and coalitions that work with them (these strategies support participation which promotes autonomy and decision-making authority, sense of community and social bonding, psychological empowerment and action which leads to change in local circumstances)

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# Empowerment strategies

**Foster** training for health and development professionals, service providers, policy makers and community leaders on community empowerment strategies and participatory research and evaluation, including partnership decision-making practices, ethical principles, power dynamics, inter-organizational skills and support for authentic community participation

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# Empowerment strategies

**Support** multi-level interventions integrating community empowerment with national and regional policies to enhance economic, political and human rights opportunities in order to have greater effect on reducing health disparities and social exclusion.

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