

## Health Case Scenarios

The purpose of the *Health Case Scenarios* activity is to gain an understanding of health by examining case scenarios that describe individuals whose physical and mental health differ. Because health is influenced by many individual and community factors, the case scenarios illustrate the difficulty of categorizing a person as entirely healthy or unhealthy.

### Health case scenario cards summary

**CARD 1.** A young man, who is a high school junior and athlete, has treatable asthma that requires the use of an inhaler. His asthma sometimes results in emergency room visits and missed days of school. He has no mental health problems and lives with a supportive family in a community with excellent health care services.

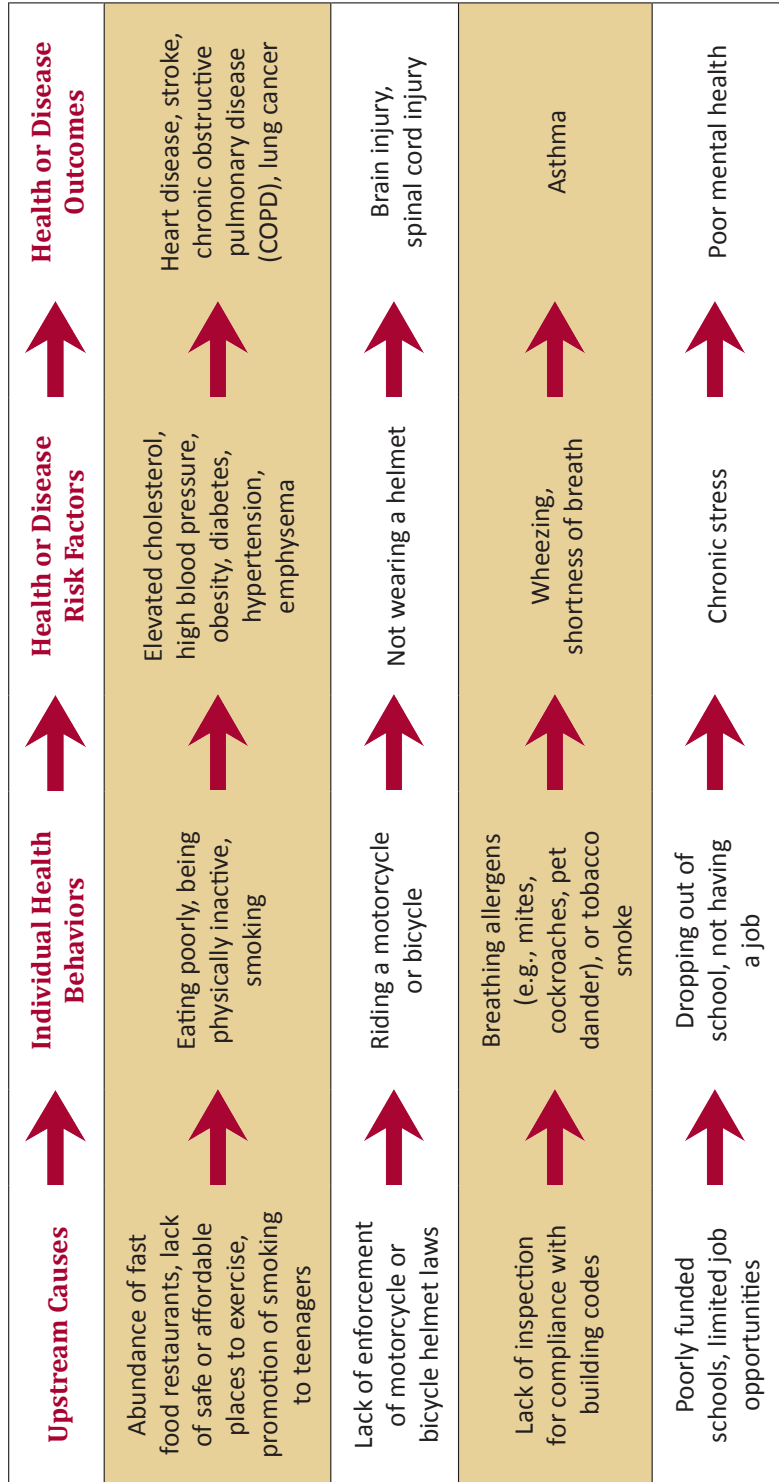
**CARD 2.** A young woman, who is a high school sophomore, has no physical or mental health problems. She is engaged in social activities at school. However, she has no health insurance and lives in a crowded apartment with her extended family in a neighborhood that has high crime rates.

**CARD 3.** A young woman, who is a high school senior, struggles with suicidal thoughts after breaking up with her long-term boyfriend. She has no physical health problems, has supportive friends, and lives in a community with many resources.

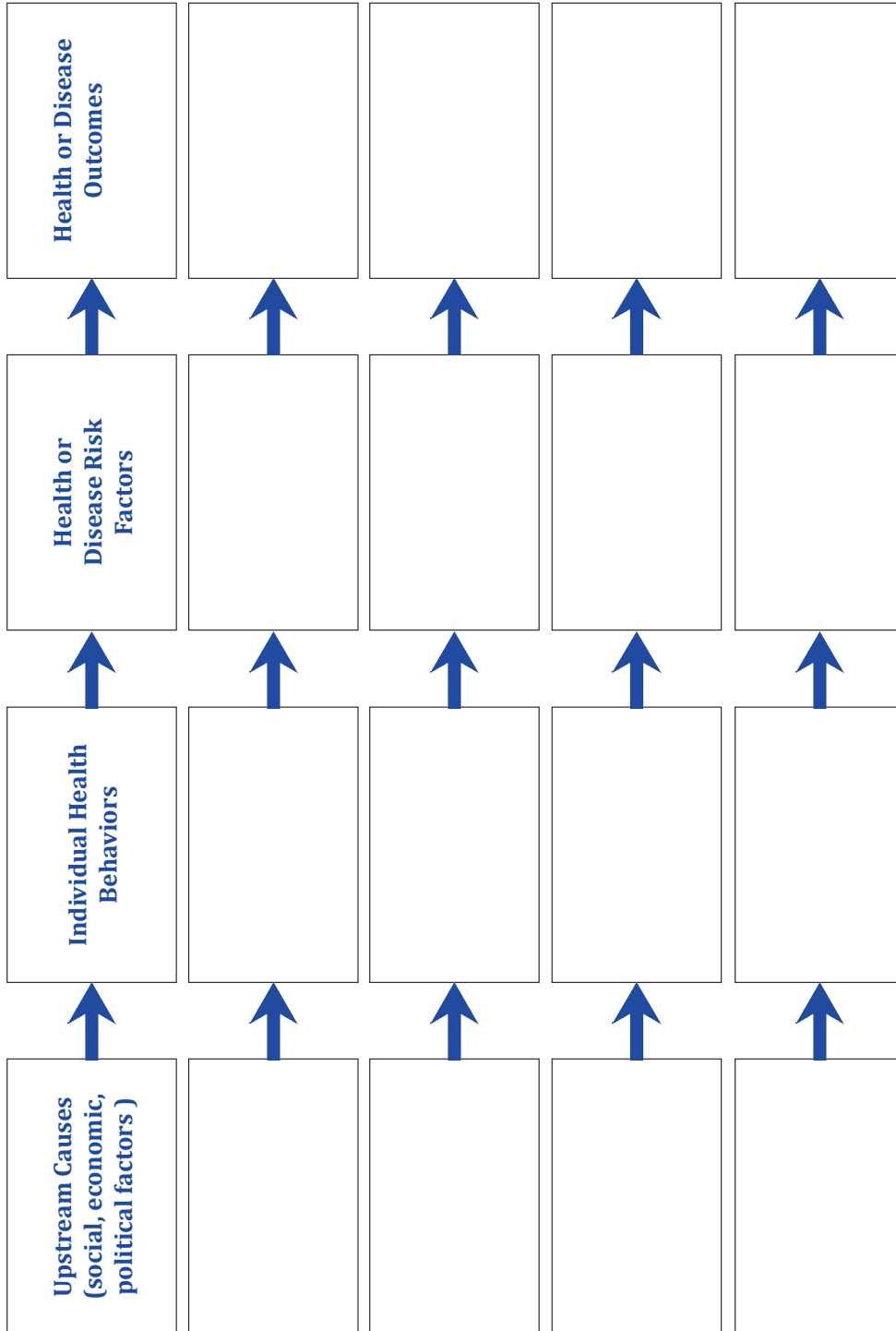
**CARD 4.** A young man, who is a high school graduate, enlisted in the army when he was 19. He was severely wounded and is now a paralyzed and uses a wheelchair. He suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), has completed one year of rehabilitation at the Veterans Affairs Hospital, and plans to enter job training. He is single and lives in a community with many social organizations and policies that support people with disabilities.

Upstream causes are the root causes of health and disease outcomes – the social, economic, or political factors that affect health as much as or more than genetics or individual behavior/lifestyle choices. **NOTE:** It is helpful to understand and identify upstream causes by first examining an outcome related to a disease or state of health and then working backwards to determine what ultimately may have caused or prevented the disease. For example: What is the health or disease outcome? What risk factors led to or protected someone from having the disease? What individual behavior choices caused or prevented the risk factors from happening? What community influences contributed to individual behavior choices? What goods, services, resources, and policies—or lack of—created those community influences? Refer to the *Upstream Causes Flow Chart – Additional Examples* for further illustration of this concept.

## Upstream Causes Flow Chart: Additional Examples



# Upstream Causes Flow Chart



## Health Case Scenario: Card 1

Since childhood, Jose has suffered from asthma. He experiences difficulty breathing as well as nighttime coughing spasms. Using an inhaler is second nature, as he never leaves home without it. Despite his chronic illness, Jose is determined to live an active lifestyle like his friends. He is a star basketball player for the high school team and plays for club teams during the off-season. He has been part of the starting line-up since freshman year. As a junior, he held the school record for the most three-point shots during a game. He has been MVP twice and is expecting to be elected captain his senior year. Such achievements are deserved as Jose is always practicing—either running sprints or shooting hoops—even outside of scheduled gym time. However, Jose often misses school for doctors' appointments and for visits to the emergency room.

Jose's mother also has asthma and worries about her son. Fortunately, the hospital is a short drive from their home and her work schedule allows her to take him there whenever needed. The family has established a relationship with the doctors and nurses on staff. They are always prepared to see Jose and treat his condition. Jose's family's insurance, provided by his father's employer, covers the latest inhalers and medication. His asthma, though problematic, is treatable and his health care expenses are affordable. He remains, however, at risk for severe asthma attacks that can require either extra medication or other interventions to help him breathe normally. While these severe asthma attacks are rare for Jose, they are potentially life threatening.

## Health Case Scenario: Card 2

Allison, a sophomore, has a packed schedule with school and work, but also finds time for extracurricular activities. She works at a community food pantry every weekend where she helps package food baskets for those in need. Allison is interested in becoming an ultrasound technician and shadows staff at the local hospital for three hours each week. She loves her volunteer position and knows that she needs to focus on academics to pursue a career in the health care field; as a result, she tries to attend all classes and complete her homework. Allison spends her spare time socializing with friends.

Allison's home life is chaotic. Her aunt and two cousins experienced financial hardship. Six months ago, they moved into Allison's family's apartment. Because of this, Allison and her sister share a bedroom with their younger cousins. Without a quiet space to do homework, studying has become challenging and Allison's grades are beginning to slip. The school library is open only during school hours and the city library closes in the evenings. Allison's schedule only allows access to a computer during her lunch period. Although she is an appropriate weight for her height, Allison has always been concerned about her figure and is constantly dieting. For this reason, she doesn't mind skipping meals and tries to finish her homework during her lunch period. Allison's mother cooks meals for the entire family every evening. To stretch the family's food budget, ingredients for dinner are limited and tend to be high in fat, sodium, and sugar, and low in protein, fruits, and vegetables. Between school and extracurricular activities, Allison typically doesn't arrive home in time to eat with her family. There is an abundance of fast food restaurants near school and in her neighborhood, though, so grabbing dinner on the go is easy. If she is still hungry before bed, her mother always saves a plate of food for her.

Allison's mom wishes she were home more often. Not only does she miss her during family dinners, but she worries about Allison coming home so late. Cutbacks in the city budget have led to fewer operating buses, especially at night. Allison waits at the bus stop across town for undetermined amounts of time. She then walks six blocks home, mostly in the dark, as there are few functioning streetlights in her neighborhood. There have been purse snatchings and a spike in gang activity, so when Alison walks home alone, it makes her mom nervous. City budget cutbacks have also led to a reduction in the police force and neighborhood patrols if Allison encounters problems.

## Health Case Scenario: Card 3

Tasha met David when he moved to town in the eighth grade. They were homeroom friends and she was assigned as his tour guide at their middle school. She helped him find his classes and introduced him to her friends and teachers. They began dating two years later when David asked Tasha to a friend's party. Now, as high school seniors, David and Tasha are planning for the future. David wants to move in with his father who lives out-of-state and work at his construction firm, while Tasha wants to attend the local community college. They fight over the differences in their life plans and eventually break up. Tasha's response to their breakup escalates from sadness to anger to thoughts of suicide. She has caring parents and a sister with whom she is close. Despite her supportive family, Tasha feels lost without David. Many days she feels that she would rather take her own life than move on without him. To keep herself occupied, she remains active in school and helps organize school events. She continues to run three miles daily in her neighborhood after school which relieves some stress.

After several weeks, Tasha confides to her best friend Lien about her suicidal feelings. Lien is conflicted about how to help. Tasha has health insurance and can seek help at a local mental health clinic or attend a support group for teens, but she is not interested. Lien is tempted to tell Tasha's parents; her mother is a social worker and knows helpful experts, but Lien feels uncomfortable and decides not to tell Tasha's parents. Instead, Lien uses the school's computer system to schedule an appointment with a counselor at the on-campus health clinic. The following morning she meets with a counselor and creates a plan to help her friend.

## Health Case Scenario: Card 4

Upon completing high school, Jeffrey served overseas in the US Armed Forces for two years. He had considered joining the military for some time. He never expected the experience to be as intense as it was nor did he anticipate getting injured. In the war zone, Jeffrey witnessed the deaths of his comrades. Just before his tour ended, he nearly died when a land mine exploded, paralyzing his legs and leaving him severely wounded. He returned home and lives with his older sister, who works day shifts as a retail sales clerk. The Veterans Affairs Hospital is located nearby and arranges daily visits by a physical therapist to help Jeffrey regain daily functions. When his health improves, Jeffrey plans to enter a job training program for veterans with disabilities. Jeffrey's city accommodates individuals with disabilities; there is wheelchair access to most buildings and sidewalks. As a result, he spends his free time meeting friends at coffee shops and reading at the library.

Jeffrey is also a member of a basketball team for young athletes in wheelchairs. A wheelchair-accessible bus takes athletes to gyms in the surrounding communities. Jeffrey was physically active before the war and appreciates the opportunity to be in a gym again. In addition, he made several friends. Attendance and enthusiasm are high, but lack of funding may jeopardize the sustainability of the program.

Although Jeffrey is steadily recovering from his physical injuries, he suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and often has severe flashbacks. Many nights he wakes in terror, remembering his experiences in the war zone. Despite the large number of veterans who experience similar PTSD symptoms, Jeffrey feels stigmatized by his disorder and has yet to seek help. A nearby Veterans Connect program for soldiers and families seeking mental health care requires daytime transportation. Though Jeffrey is interested in attending the program, he lacks transportation to the hospital.

## Upstream Causes Story Card

Imagine you are walking along a riverbank at a local park when you notice a woman drowning just off shore. You jump in to save her. Just as you pull her from the water, you notice a man also struggling to stay afloat, and you rescue him too. The pattern continues: more individuals are at risk of drowning, and you rescue them. Becoming an impromptu lifeguard is exhausting and you fear that you cannot save everyone floating past you, especially with the strong river current. You realize you should investigate why these individuals are falling into the water in the first place – perhaps identifying the primary reason for them falling in the water will allow you to stop the problem at the source and save lives. You walk upstream and discover a bridge connecting two areas of the park. Upon close inspection, you notice a large uncovered hole in the bridge – precisely where unsuspecting individuals are falling. You immediately contact city authorities to request that they repair the hole. You suggest that they monitor their parks to prevent similar disasters.



## Upstream Causes Flow Chart: Upstream Causes Story

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