OPTIMAL HEALTH

Every aspect of IWH's Protego Strategy, including the Women's Optimal Health Framework, promotes Optimal Health, the highest possible standard of well-being, which includes physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual health.

- The term was first defined in 2009 but implied in the WHO definition for health, "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.
- Optimal Health prioritizes policies that promote best possible health-outcomes-for-all by emphasizing disease prevention and systems-wide health promotion and by engaging all relevant stakeholders in this endeavor.
- The Framework strongly supports health for all women and their families - regardless of their condition or stage of life - specifically focused on empowerment to reach the highest standard of overall health, not merely the absence of disease.

> "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 importantly, through the creation of opportunities that open access to environments that make positive health practices the easiest choice."
> -O'Donnell, 2009

The Framework applies Optimal Health through four approaches that recognize:

1. Support Systems and Wellness: Individuals learn health choices and behaviors from support systems in their environment, including family, community, education, and faith, in addition to healthcare. These support systems provide examples and patterns that either strengthen or undermine wellness. Optimal Health approaches focus on the continual improvement of the population's overall health, intentionally leaving no one behind and involving every support system to achieve this goal.

2. Health Risks Avoidance: Optimal Health reinforces current healthy behaviors and reduces health risks that can be modified, with the goal of eliminating these risks whenever possible. Success is indicated by an individual's movement away from risk. The Optimal Health model offers hope and positive movement toward healthier outcomes, regardless of an individual's past or current reality. Behavioral choices significantly impact health. When tobacco smoking was clearly linked to cancer and lung disease, a campaign encouraged those who had never smoked not to start, and those who were smoking were encouraged to reduce and then stop tobacco use. The same principles apply to other behavioral choices. For those who have not engaged in other health risks, there are health benefits to continuing to avoid risky behavior. Communities can also commit to reducing and eliminating risk. Providing Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) facilities, eliminating stagnant water, managing wastes and pollutants, and promoting hand hygiene can be seen as moving from a high-risk to a low-risk to a no-risk situation in a community.

3. Personal and Family Agency: Optimal Health believes in the power of individuals and families to influence their own well-being through knowledge, motivation, skills, and shared support to maintain healthy behaviors or adopt healthier behaviors in the future. Improving nutrition, physical activity, relationships, risk behaviors, sleep, and work routines can be possible. Risky personal choices around alcohol use, tobacco use, drugs, violence, and high-risk sexual behaviors can be reduced or eliminated through personal decision-making and appropriate support. Every individual across the lifespan is valuable, from conception to end-of-life, and should be supported to attain Optimal Health. No person should be viewed as incapable of improving his or her choices and life outcomes. Optimal Health is a framework that offers hope and help to improve well-being.

4. Social Norms for Public Health Improvement: Social norms establish an environment that can either improve or damage the health and well-being of individuals in a community or society. Strengthened social norms can reduce the incidence of behavioral risks and health threats. The WOHF consistently promotes community support for every person at every life stage, including vulnerable individuals and those with developmental or physical challenges. The WOHF also advocates for the prevention of violence, coercion, and neglect. Public health should promote Optimal Health through various means to encourage physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being.

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