

OVERVIEW

Public health promotes and protects the health of people and communities at the population level. Most issues faced in public health involve some element of human behavior, so the principles of behavior analysis can complement and enhance interventions at all three levels of public health: primary (i.e., prevention), secondary (i.e., screening), and tertiary (i.e., treatment). A cohesive operant framework, for example, can inform assessment and intervention development to increase positive health behaviors (e.g., healthy food choices, increased exercise) and mitigate behaviors that negatively impact population health (e.g., improper hand hygiene, smoking). Work can also be done with policymakers, local and state departments of health, and other stakeholders to identify health behaviors and implement interventions that promote and protect the health of the community.

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Initial Publication

Ferster, C. B., Nurnberger, J. I., & Levitt, E. B. (2014). The control of eating. *Obesity Research*, 4(4), 401–410. <https://doi.org/10.1002/oby.1996.4.4.401> (Reprinted from “The control of eating,” 1962, *Journal of Mathematics*, 1[1], 87–109.)

Recommended Reading

Winett, R. A., Moore, J. F., & Anderson, E. S. (1991). Extending the concept of social validity: Behavior analysis for disease prevention and health promotion. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 24(2), 215–230. <https://doi.org/10.1901/jaba.1991.24-215>

Hovell, M. F., Wahlgren, D. R., & Gehrman, C. A. (2002). The behavioral ecological model: Integrating public health and behavioral science. In R. J. DiClemente, R. A. Crosby, & M. C. Kegler (Eds.), *Emerging theories in health promotion practice and research. Strategies for improving public health* (pp. 347–385). Jossey-Bass.

Horne, P. J., Tapper, K., Lowe, C. F., Hardman, C. A., Jackson, M. C., & Woolner, J. (2004). Increasing children’s fruit and vegetable consumption: A peer-modelling and rewards-based intervention. *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 58, 1649–1660. <https://doi.org/10.1038/sj.ejcn.1602024>

Dresler-Hawke, E., & Whitehead, D. (2009). The behavioral ecological model as a framework for school-based anti-bullying health promotion interventions. *The Journal of School Nursing*, 25(3), 195–204. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1059840509334364>

Ginja, S., Gallagher, S., & Keenan, M. (2021). Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) behaviour change research: Why an analysis of contingencies of reinforcement is needed. *International Journal of Environmental Health Research*, 31(6), 715–728. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09603123.2019.1682127>

Normand, M. P., Dallery, J., & Slanzi, C. M. (2021). Leveraging applied behavior analysis research and practice in the service of public health. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 54(2), 457–483. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaba.832>

Additional Resources

- ▶ Behaviorists for Social Responsibility: <https://bfsr.abainternational.org/>
- ▶ American Public Health Association: <https://apha.org/>