



# Social determinants of health

## Addressing patients' social health needs

ICD-10-CM SDOH codes included

Sixty percent of a person's health is impacted by behavioral, environmental and social conditions.<sup>1</sup>

While the clinical aspects of patient health remain the highest priority for diagnosis and treatment, understanding the patients' social needs can provide a holistic view of their overall health. Your patients' lifestyle choices often can put them at higher risks for health challenges like obesity, depression and heart disease, and sometimes can lead to multiple emergency department visits.<sup>2</sup> By identifying and addressing social determinants of health (SDOH), you and your staff are taking a comprehensive approach to patient care.

### Social determinants of health

These are conditions in the environments in which people live, learn, work, play, worship and age. They affect a wide range of health, functions and quality-of-life outcomes and risks. SDOH include, but are not limited to, food insecurity, loneliness and social isolation, housing quality and instability, transportation, physical inactivity, income and social status, employment and working conditions.

#### Food insecurity

Food insecurity occurs when people have limited or uncertain access to enough food to live a healthy, active life.<sup>3</sup>

- **37 million** people are living in food insecure households; that means **1 in 9** Americans are food insecure.<sup>4</sup>
- Seniors who are food insecure are:<sup>5</sup>
  - **50%** more likely to have diabetes
  - **60%** more likely to have congestive heart failure (CHF) or experience a heart attack
  - **2 times** as likely to have asthma

#### Loneliness and social isolation

Loneliness is a feeling of sadness or distress about being by yourself or feeling disconnected from the world around you. Related but different, social isolation is being physically separated from other people and your social connections.

- **1 in 5** Americans always or often feel lonely or socially isolated<sup>6</sup> and **43%** of older adults report being lonely.<sup>7</sup>
- Seniors who are lonely are:
  - **64%** more likely to develop clinical dementia and have double the risk of Alzheimer's
  - **4 times** more likely to be re-hospitalized within a year of discharge

#### Housing instability

Individuals experiencing housing instability may experience chronic or intermittent homelessness, which may expose them to a number of health hazards such as trauma and chronic stress. This may lead to injury, disease, mental illness and behavioral health issues, like substance abuse. Housing instability can also decrease the effectiveness of healthcare

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.partnersbhm.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/WPIC\\_White\\_Paper\\_revise\\_7.19.2017.pdf](https://www.partnersbhm.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/WPIC_White_Paper_revise_7.19.2017.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> NEJM Catalyst, SDOH, Dec. 2017, <https://catalyst.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/CAT.17.0312>

<sup>3</sup> Feeding America, [www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/senior-hunger-facts](http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/senior-hunger-facts)

<sup>4</sup> Feeding America, Health+Hunger, Oct. 2019, <https://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/2019/10/food-insecurity-poverty-ratesimprove-pre-recession-levels-2018-1-9-people-still-risk-hunger/>

<sup>5</sup> Food Research & Action Center, Hunger & Health, December 2017, <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/hunger-healthimpact-poverty-food-insecurity-health-well-being.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation, Aug. 2018, <https://www.kff.org/report-section/loneliness-and-social-isolation-in-the-united-states-the-united-kingdom-and-japan-an-international-survey-introduction/>

<sup>7</sup> Researchers Confront an Epidemic of Loneliness, The New York Times, September 2016, [https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/06/health/loneliness-aging-health-effects.html?\\_r=14](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/06/health/loneliness-aging-health-effects.html?_r=14)

interventions.<sup>8</sup>

- **2.3 million** people in the U.S. were evicted in 2016; that's a rate of **4 people per minute**
- **16.3%** of U.S. households in 2017 were severely cost-burdened, paying more than **50%** of their income for housing<sup>9</sup>

## Identifying and screening for SDOH

Addressing social health needs alongside clinical needs improves the whole-person health of your patients. During annual wellness exams or regular appointments with patients, incorporate the following SDOH screenings into your conversations:

- **The Hunger Vital Sign™** – U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
- **Loneliness Scale** – University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)
- **Accountable Health Communities Health-Related Social Needs Screening Tool** – Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation (CMMI)

## Coding for SDOH

It is a best practice to document patient screening results in the EHR/EMR so you and your care team can track patient progress over time, and communicate screening results to the patient's health insurer. By using ICD-10-CM codes in categories Z55-Z65 (listed below), you're able to provide clear documentation that's interoperable across payer systems.

### Food insecurity

- Z59.4 Lack of adequate food/drinking water

### Loneliness/lack of primary support group

- Z60.2 Problems related to living Alone
- Z60.4 Social Exclusion and Rejection
- Z63.8 Other specified problems related to primary support group
- Z63.9 Problems related to Primary Support Group, unspecified

### Housing instability and problems with economic circumstances

- Z59.0 Homelessness
- Z59.1 Housing, Inadequate
- Z59.8 Other Problems related to housing and economic circumstances
- Z59.9 Problems related to housing and economic circumstances, unspecified

## Resources for help and support

Helping your patients connect with national and local assistance programs can help provide the support they need. Along with patients connecting with their health insurer on eligible benefits, available resources may include:

### General resources

- [211 Helpline Center](#)
- [Area Agencies on Aging](#)
- [Connect2Affect](#)

### Loneliness and social isolation

- [Senior Corps](#)
- [Volunteer Match](#)
- [Friendship Line](#)

### Food insecurity

- [Feeding America Food Banks](#)
- [Women, Infants and Children \(WIC\)](#)
- [Programs for Children](#)
- [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#)
- [Eldercare Locator](#)

<sup>8</sup> Housing Issue Brief, Humana Inc. June 2020, [https://populationhealth.humana.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Humana\\_HousingBrief\\_Final\\_External\\_version\\_2020.pdf](https://populationhealth.humana.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Humana_HousingBrief_Final_External_version_2020.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, American Housing Survey, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/ahs/data/interactive/ahstablecreator.html>