

Policy At A Glance:

Social Determinants of Health: Screening and Outreach (AB 85)

The social determinants of health (SDOH) are the conditions in which individuals are born, grow, work, and age that affect health. This brief will provide some background information on SDOH and give an overview of California's proposal to address SDOH through AB 85.

Introduction

Research has shown that unmet social needs are correlated with poor health status. For example, food insecurity, unemployment, and inadequate housing are all directly correlated with higher risk of developing chronic diseases and contracting infectious diseases; increased chance of injury; inhibition of childhood development; and poor mental health.¹ These social needs that affect health are called the social determinants of health (SDOH), which are the conditions in which individuals are born, grow, live, work, and age.^{1,2,3}

Passed in the California Assembly on May 25, 2023, Assembly Bill 85 (AB 85) aims to ensure that health teams have the resources necessary to conduct social determinant of health screenings, provide referrals, and connect patients with community-based organizations and social resources through community health workers (CHWs).^{1,4} AB 85 aims to achieve health equity and optimal health outcomes for individuals and families throughout California.¹

This brief will provide additional background information on SDOH in the context of the national Healthy People 2030 goals and explore how AB 85 aims to fill in the gaps between physical health and social needs by addressing the social determinants of health.

Process of Care: Linking Patients with Social Needs to Social Care and Resources⁵

- Step 1:** Provider conducts SDOH screening and identifies social risk(s).
- Step 2:** Provider consults with patient and refers to a CHW.
- Step 3:** CHW and patient connect.
- Step 4:** Patient utilizes community resources and social services available.
- Step 5:** Changes in healthcare utilization, health, and social outcomes occur.

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Social Determinants of Health and Healthy People 2030

The social determinants of health (SDOH) are the non-medical factors that influence health outcomes and have a major impact on people's health, well-being and quality of life.^{2,3}

Examples of SDOH include safe housing, transportation, and neighborhoods; racism, discrimination, and violence; education, job opportunities, and income; access to nutritious food and physical activity opportunities; and polluted air and water.⁶ Furthermore, the SDOH are one of three priority areas for Healthy People 2030, which is a public health framework that sets data-driven national objectives every 10 years to improve health.^{3,7}

Economic Stability

Currently, 1 in 10 people in the U.S. live in poverty and many cannot afford healthy foods, healthcare, and housing. Evidence shows that people with steady employment are less likely to live in poverty and are more likely to be healthy. Therefore, the Healthy People 2030 goal in this domain is to "help people earn steady incomes that allow them to meet their health needs."⁸

Education Access and Quality

Research has shown that people with higher levels of educational attainment are more likely to live healthier and longer lives. Children from low-income families, children with disabilities, and children who often experience forms of social discrimination (e.g., bullying) are less likely to graduate from high school or attend

college. Therefore, the Healthy People 2030 goal in this domain is to "increase educational opportunities and help children and adolescents do well in school."⁹

Healthcare Access and Quality

Many people in the U.S. do not receive the healthcare services they need and approximately 1 in 10 do not have health insurance. Without insurance, people are less likely to have a primary care provider and may not be able to afford the healthcare services and medications they need. Therefore, the Healthy People 2030 goal in this domain is to "increase access to comprehensive, high-quality healthcare services."¹⁰

Neighborhood and Built Environment

Neighborhoods that people live in can have a major impact on an individual's health and wellbeing. Many neighborhoods in the U.S. have high rates of violence; unsafe air or water; and other health and safety risks. Therefore, the Healthy People 2030 goal in this domain is to "create neighborhoods and environments that promote health and safety."¹¹

Social and Community Context

Relationships and interactions with friends, family, co-workers, and community members can have a large impact on an individual's health and wellbeing. Therefore, the Healthy People 2030 goal in this domain is to "increase social and community support."¹²

How AB 85 Would Address the Social Determinants of Health

Bill Summary of AB 85

In order to achieve health equity and optimal health outcomes, it is critical to identify and address the SDOH for all individuals and families.¹ Therefore, AB 85 would require healthcare service plan contracts and health insurance policies issued, amended, or renewed on or after January 1, 2024, to include coverage for screenings for the SDOH.^{1,13} Additionally, it would make SDOH screenings a covered benefit for the 24.9 million Californians enrolled in Medi-Cal.^{4,14} The coverage change includes commercial and California Public Employees' Retirement System (CalPERS) enrollees, as well as Medi-Cal beneficiaries enrolled in the Department of Managed Health Care (DMHC)-regulated Medi-Cal managed care plans and county organized health systems (COHS).⁵

AB 85 would also ensure that healthcare teams have the necessary resources to conduct SDOH screenings and allow time for providers to discuss behaviors and social factors that influence patient health outcomes.¹⁵ Furthermore, this bill increases the effort to link patients with community resources or government social services to address their SDOH needs by requiring

health plans and insurers to provide access to community health workers (CHWs).^{4,15} Lastly, this bill would establish a work group to create a standardized model and procedures for linking patients with community resources and determine gaps in research and data to inform policies on system changes to address the SDOH.⁴

Benefits Coverage

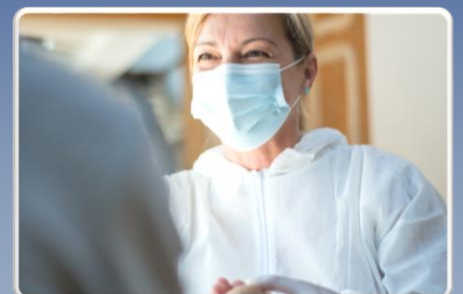
Currently, 75% of enrollees with health insurance regulated by DMHC or the California Department of Insurance (CDI) already have coverage for SDOH screenings. As a result of AB 85, the remaining 25% of enrollees would gain coverage for SDOH screenings, representing a 32.7% increase in benefit coverage.⁵

Expenditures

AB 85 would increase total annual expenditures by approximately \$9,900,000, or 0.01%, for enrollees in state-regulated insurance. However, enrollees with insurance purchased outside of Covered California would experience the largest increase in enrollee premiums due to lower levels of benefit coverage at baseline.⁵

Community Health Workers

Beginning in July 2022, the Department of Health Care Services added community health worker (CHW) services as a Medi-Cal benefit.¹⁶ CHWs are frontline public health workers who are trusted community members or individuals who have a particularly good understanding of the community they serve. They act as a liaison between communities, healthcare systems, and state health departments to facilitate access to services and improve the quality and cultural competence of service delivery.¹⁷ CHWs provide support to local healthcare organizations and systems through various tasks, depending on the type of community they serve.¹⁸



Conclusion

It is critical to identify and address the SDOH for all individuals and families to ensure health equity and positive health outcomes.¹ While opportunities to advance health equity through increased access to primary care is important, addressing the ways in which the SDOH increase or decrease the risk of poor health outcomes is critical to improving the nation's health and wellbeing.¹⁹ Research has shown that socioeconomic factors alone account for up to 47% of health outcomes, while health behaviors, clinical care, and the physical environment account for 34%, 16%, and 3% of health outcomes, respectively.^{19,20} Health interventions at the SDOH level have been proven to be effective at decreasing healthcare costs in the long term. Through a multi-sectoral approach, increasing the use of SDOH screenings as well as CHWs and community-based organizations can have a positive impact on both individual and community health.

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Did you know?

There is currently an estimated 61,010 CHWs working in the United States and, in September 2022, the Biden Administration invested \$225 million to train over 13,000 CHWs through the American Rescue Plan.²¹



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