

The Improving Social Determinants of Health Act of 2023 (S./ H.R.)






Background

Social and economic conditions such as access to housing, employment, nutrition security, and education have a major influence on individual and community health.¹ These conditions – often referred to as the Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) – are receiving increased attention from insurance companies, hospitals, healthcare systems, and governmental agencies interested in improving health outcomes and controlling costs.²

While payers and healthcare systems can screen, identify, and make referrals to other organizations for non-medical social needs, they cannot ensure that there are adequate resources and the policies in place to meet the needs of the referred or that resources are equitably utilized. Currently, efforts supported by health care systems are short term – such as temporary housing, nutrition after medical discharge, or transportation – and do not necessarily address the underlying economic and social factors in communities beyond the individual patient.³

Public health departments are uniquely situated to gather data from multiple sources, identify gaps in services, build collaborations across sectors, identify non-medical drivers of health in communities, and help address policies that inhibit health (see Figure).

THE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS SPECTRUM

Roles for Healthcare	 Screening for necessary social, economic, and safety issues in clinical & other settings	 In-house social services assistance (at clinical site where screening is performed)	 Anchor institution promoting equity via hiring, investments, community benefits	 Community-based social and related services: single or multiple programs or services	 Changes to laws, regulations, or community-wide conditions; working across sectors
Roles for Public Health Departments (PHDs)	PHDs can offer best practice screening materials and can aggregate/ analyze data across facilities regarding need.	PHDs can convene community organizations and other sectors to promote linkages, develop materials & advocate for SDOH-related reimbursement.	PHDs can collaborate with one or more anchor institutions, assist them in prioritizing, evidence-based approaches & community-wide strategies.	PHDs can demonstrate need with data, make case for funding for needed services and/ or fund programs themselves.	PHDs can provide evidence of need and demonstrate efficacy of policies and laws at promote health and address the SDOHs.

Both the healthcare and public health sectors are needed to fully address SDOHs: the clinical side can respond to some individual needs, while public health is best suited to meet the needs of a broader population (as well as to prevent unmet needs in the future). The Improving Social Determinants of Health Act of 2023 will increase public health’s capacity to fully address SDOH priorities.

The Improving Social Determinants of Health Act of 2023 (S. /H.R.) Summary

THE BILL WILL AUTHORIZE \$100 MILLION PER YEAR FOR THE CDC TO MAINTAIN AND GROW A PROGRAM TO:

- Improve health outcomes and reduce health inequities by coordinating CDC SDOH activities.
- Improve capacity of public health agencies and community-based organizations to address SDOHs.

THE PROGRAM WOULD

- Award grants to state, local, territorial, and Tribal health agencies and organizations to address SDOHs in target communities.
- Award grants to nonprofit organizations and institutions of higher education to conduct research on SDOH best practices; provide technical assistance, training, and evaluation assistance to target community grantees; and disseminate best practices.
- Coordinate across CDC to ensure programs consider and incorporate SDOH in grants and activities.
- Coordinate, support, and inform SDOH activities across the Department of Health and Human Services.
- Collect and analyze data related to SDOH activities.

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Citations:

¹Taylor, L et. al, "Leveraging the Social Determinants of Health: What Works?" Yale Global Health Leadership Institute and the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation of Massachusetts, June 2015 https://bluecrossmafoundation.org/sites/default/files/download/publication/Social_Equity_Report_Final.pdf

²See Social Interventions Research & Evaluation Network (SIREN) at University of California, San Francisco for evidence of effective programs for identifying and addressing social risk in healthcare settings. <https://sirenetwork.ucsf.edu>

³Castrucci, B. & Auerbach, J. "Meeting Individual Social Needs Falls Short of Addressing Social Determinants of Health." Health Affairs Blog. January 16, 2019. <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hblog20190115.234942/ful>