



Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)

What are social determinants of health?

Social determinants of health (SDOH) are non-medical social needs that influence individual health outcomes. How much money someone makes, where they live, whether they have stable housing and reliable transportation, and the quality of food they can access are examples of social determinants of health. Social factors like these contribute to 80% of a person's health outcomes—such as mortality, morbidity, life expectancy, healthcare spending, and overall health status¹—while the health care they receive accounts for just 20%.²

The World Health Organization (WHO), defines SDOH factors as “the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life.” The main categories of SDOH¹ include:

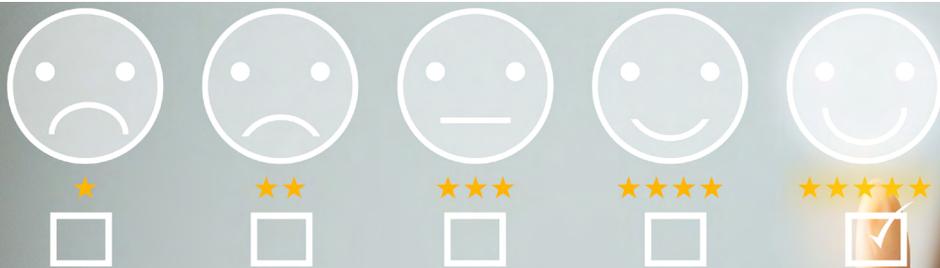
- Economic stability
- Education access and quality
- Healthcare access and quality
- Neighborhood and environment
- Social and community context

Why employers should screen for social determinants of health

People with unmet social needs are less likely to access the health care they need, even if it's available. Organizations that don't address the social risk factors affecting their workforce experience an endless cycle of reactive care, poor health outcomes, and higher healthcare costs. For employers who want to achieve health equity for their employees and improve the wellbeing of their workforce, identifying and addressing social determinants of health is critical.

Employees are affected by different social factors. Some employees may have a higher salary, work remotely from their suburban homes, and access farmers markets and high-quality medical centers. Other employees may live paycheck to paycheck, have a long commute to work using public transportation, and struggle with unreliable childcare.

To correctly identify the social factors affecting employees and to offer the right resources, employers can systematically gather and analyze data using an SDOH screening tool.³



What is an SDOH screening tool and how do they work?

An SDOH screening tool is a questionnaire that gathers data from individual employees, giving an organization insight into how many employees might need support with a specific social need and the level of that need.

SDOH screening tools ask about various topics such as finances, family and community support, education, physical activity, substance use, mental health, and disabilities.³ Some of these questions are best answered through anonymized surveys, while others can be answered using HR and payroll information, disability data, and aggregated health claims data.⁴ Since SDOH data is highly sensitive, it's important that organizations take care to protect individuals' privacy.

Why employers should screen for social determinants of health

Though there is no standardized SDOH screening tool available, employers can reference and repurpose questionnaires shared by other organizations.

- [The Accountable Health Communities Health-Related Social Needs Screening Tool \(CMS\)](#)
- [OneCare Vermont: Self-Sufficiency Outcomes Matrix \(CHCS\)](#)
- [AccessHealth Spartanburg: Social Determinants Screening Tool \(CHCS\)](#)
- [Social Needs Screening Toolkit \(Health Leads\)](#)
- [Social Determinants of Health Guide to Social Needs Screening \(The EveryOne Project\)](#)

Organizations can also utilize SDOH data collected by their health plans and benefits vendors, which can help provide even more context on the social needs of their workforce.

What can organizations do once they have SDOH data?

Once SDOH data is collected, employers should analyze it using an equity lens. This includes assessing healthcare contributions and plan designs, determining which benefits might be missing, and considering the structure of the benefits currently offered.¹

Collecting, analyzing, and interpreting SDOH data is an essential step toward health equity, improved health outcomes, and lower healthcare costs.

Resources

1. <https://online.flippingbook.com/view/703279374/34/>
2. [https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(15\)00514-0/fulltext](https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(15)00514-0/fulltext)
3. <https://innovation.cms.gov/files/worksheets/ahcm-screeningtool.pdf>
4. <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/benefits/pages/consider-social-determinants-of-health-when-offering-benefits.aspx>