

Social Determinants of Health

A Springbuk Perspective



Social determinants of health (SDoH) have been used in the public health sector for decades, particularly focused in Medicare, Medicaid, and uninsured populations to improve outcomes of vulnerable individuals. However, recently, employers have applied those learnings to commercially insured populations. In the wake of a pandemic and social unrest, the idea of **employers, payers, and providers using SDoH** to improve both access and outcomes for members and lower overall healthcare costs, as well as address health equity and the impact of health benefits/programs, has become a common topic of conversation.

“The nature of our healthcare ecosystem has been that of **care provided in silos. Health insurers, providers, and community resources all have their own relationships with the member, patient, and consumer, but **rarely do the three come together** with the patient’s well-being prioritized as a unifying mission”** - [HealthEdge](#)

Despite the ongoing rising healthcare costs, it has become apparent that the amount of medical care we receive does not equate to being “healthy.” As illustrated by the **CommonWealth Fund**, the U.S. spends more on healthcare than any other country, yet has the lowest life expectancy of the 36 OECD member countries.

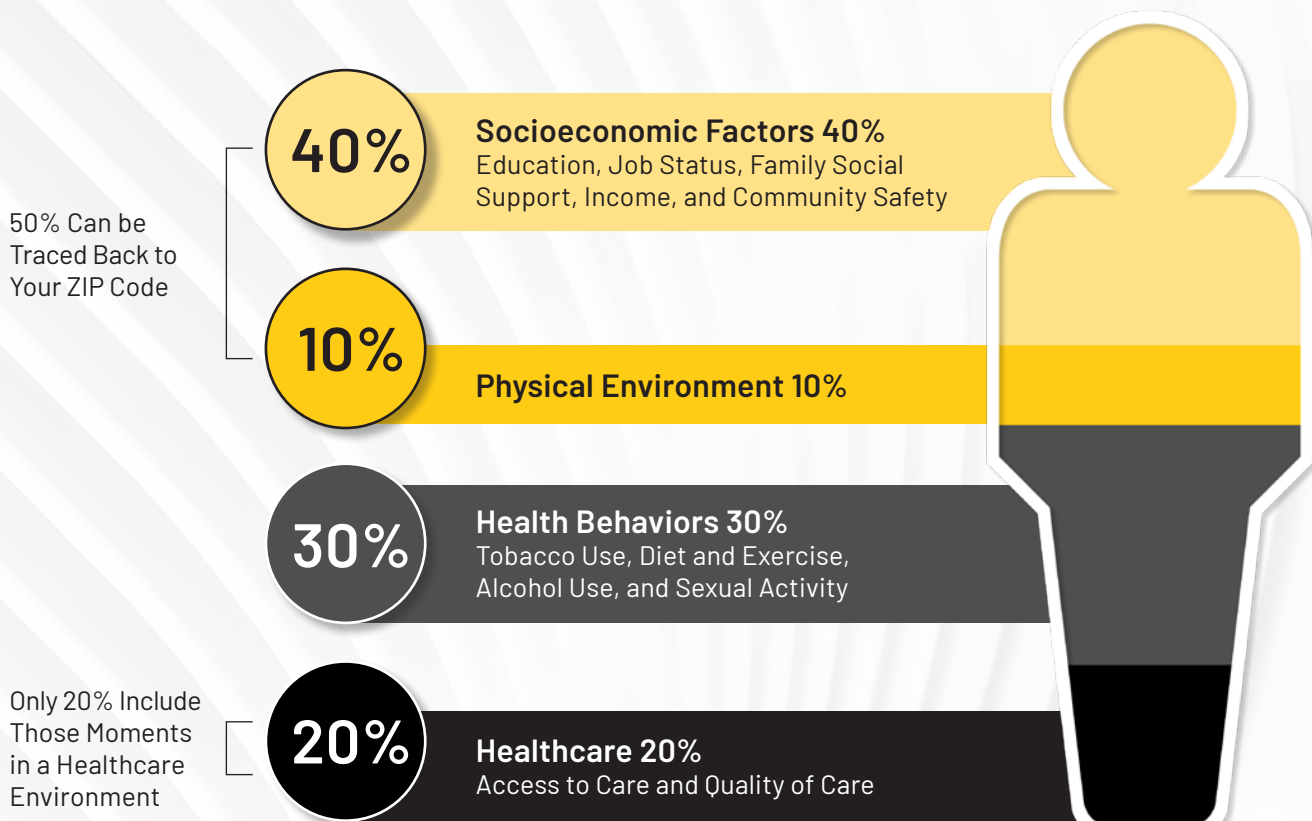
Medical care alone has a minimal effect on overall health (20%), while we see a tremendous impact from individual behaviors, genetics, social circumstances, access to healthcare, and environmental factors. Ideally, by addressing these five factors that contribute to Social Determinants of Health, in conjunction with medical care, we begin the holistic approach to patient care.



More than Healthcare Coverage

Employers have a vested interest in their employees' health and play a **critical role** in offering access to healthcare coverage and well-being programs. Still, we know this only addresses a fraction of the total health continuum.

By considering **social determinants**, employers have the potential to successfully improve population health and the impact of investments in employee health and well-being.



Source: Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement, Going Beyond Clinical Walls: Solving Complex Problems (October 2014)

Social Determinants of Health vs. Individual and Social Needs

At the core, social determinants of health are about **improving the underlying social and economic conditions within communities to improve the health for all**. However, as employers step in to consider the social determinants of health, we have seen initiatives that are directed more at the individual level of impact.

By understanding the social determinants of health impacting the communities in which employees live, work, and grow - **employers can begin to address the individual social needs** that some employees will have and identify demographic pockets where the needs and solutions are different.



STRATEGIES



TACTICS

Improve Community Conditions

UPSTREAM
Community Impact

Laws, policies, and regulations that create community conditions supporting health for all people

Addressing Individuals' Social Needs

MIDSTREAM
Individual Impact

Include patient screening questions about social factors like housing and food access; use data to inform care and provide referrals

Social workers, community health workers, and/or community based organizations providing direct support/assistance to meet patients social needs

Providing Clinical Care

DOWNSTREAM
Healthcare Impact

Medical interventions

As the illustration above demonstrates, there is a place for **both community and individual impact** that will have positive effects downstream – but by only addressing individual impact, it is truly an upstream battle to address the root cause. **By addressing both community and individual impact**, we are most likely to see near-term progress and impact at the individual level while working towards long-term sustainable solutions within our communities.

“This isn’t about picking one approach over another – we need social and economic interventions at both the community and individual levels”

- Health Affairs



Community Social Determinants of Health

It's important to distinguish between community and individual strategies to understand the key role employers can play. At the community level, the focus is on overarching initiatives to address the conditions where people are born, live, work, and grow.

This often includes policy and legislation as well as collaboration with key community stakeholders to drive initiatives. **These are initiatives that take time,** years often, to begin to see change and positive outcomes. Employers may also struggle to engage at the community level due to a lack of resources, experience, or expertise.



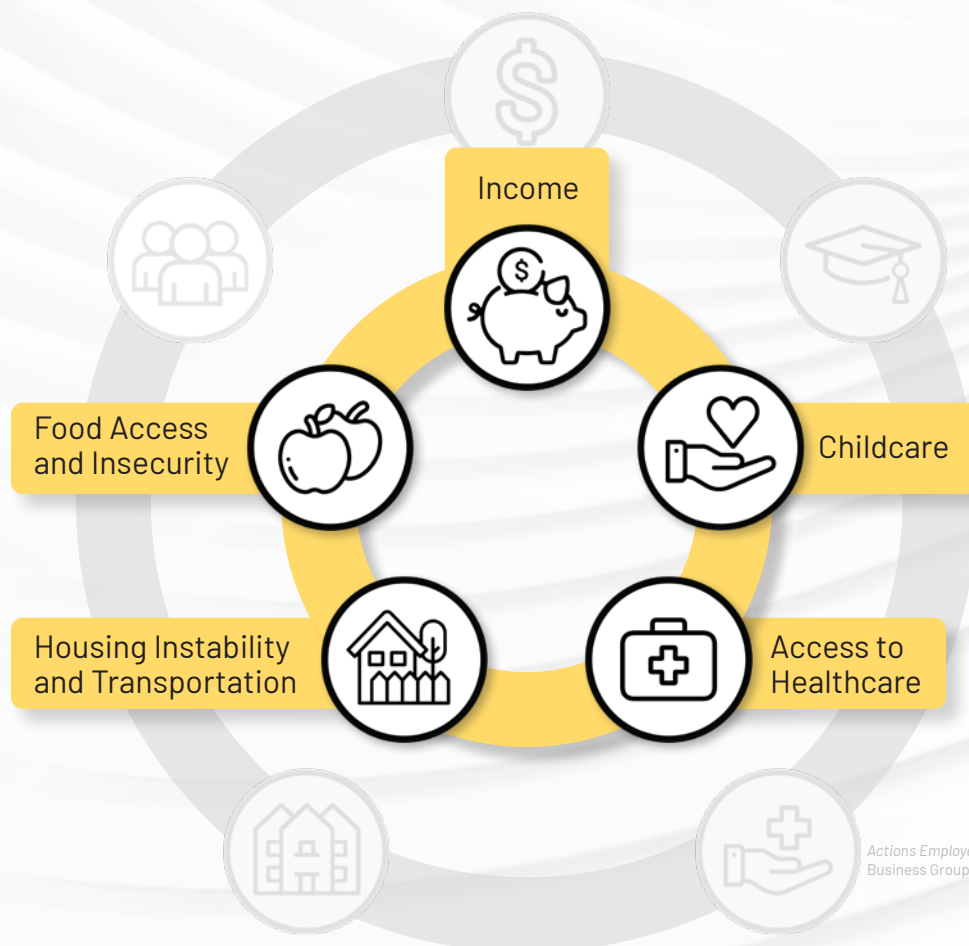
Actions Employers Can Take to Address Social Determinants. Business Group on Health. October 2020



Individual and Community Social Needs within Social Determinants of Health

It's at the individual level, or midstream, where employers are gaining more traction and impacting their member populations. In contrast to the community approach, **the individual approach is from the inside out rather than top down.**

From this perspective, employers can think of **social determinants through the lens of the individuals they serve** by understanding the unique needs of their population rather than community level needs.



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Springbuk's Forward-thinking Approach

As employers move forward looking to understand ways they can address the needs of their population, we see the **need to move from standard plan and behavior modification programs** to larger well-being initiatives and those that address the root causes of underlying conditions.

Springbuk is uniquely positioned to lead our clients with an understanding of how community and individual needs affect their unique member population. We have identified six key categories where data related to individual and social determinants can be instrumental in designing impactful population health strategies.



6 Data-Informing Strategies for SDoH

Health Plan Data Integration

- › Understand how social determinant information and factors affect overall healthcare cost and utilization
- › Understand associations between the data and how this leads to inefficiencies in healthcare usage and higher costs as well as disease burden

Utilization Navigation

- › Identify and provide informed strategies around utilization and guidance of the healthcare plan
- › Understand drivers of suboptimal plan utilizers

Benefit Plan Design

- › Design benefit plans that meet the needs of the whole population, not just segments
- › Understand the impact of changes over time to utilization and overall cost

Care Management and Intervention Opportunities

- › Influence communication, mode of outreach, and address health literacy provided by key clinical partners and care managers

Education and Communication

- › Ability to communicate with members in most effective ways to address language, education level, and health literacy, among other factors

Predictive Modeling

- › Identify risk more accurately
- › Understand risk of developing a disease associated with high healthcare costs

More specifically, key data fields related to social determinants and demographics allow Springbuk to address vital use cases for individual and social needs.

In addition to the current data captured, Springbuk can utilize publicly available sources of information on Social Determinants of Health that can further enhance the analysis and surface trends at the population level. Some sources include AHRO SDoH Database, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), County Health Rankings, CDC Social Vulnerability Index (SVI), Area Deprivation Index (ADI), and others.

● Mental Health Impact

- › Has expansion of virtual care or telemedicine impacted efforts around mental health?
- › Do members have access to the right care and technology to use new options for care?

● Utilization Patterns

- › How are members accessing and using care differently based on where they live and work?
- › How does health literacy and education impact the overall health plan utilization?

● Childcare

- › How does access to childcare impact your population?
- › How are your current strategies affecting various member segments and overall effectiveness?

● Adherence to Care Guidelines

- › Do employees with chronic conditions and preventive care gaps have reliable access to primary care?
- › What are the commonalities with job codes, compensations, and locations that can allow employers to address adherence to their care guidelines?

● Disability and Leave Trends

- › Do you have higher utilization of disability or leave within certain locations, by job type or coverage type?
- › What are common risk factors and conditions with members on disability?



Applying Social Determinants of Health Data



We believe in the intelligent integration of data to provide a pathway forward to identify ways to best use social determinants of health.

As we have outlined throughout this paper, the ability to leverage data related to social determinants of health at both an individual and community level allows for employers to have the greatest impact on their member populations and improve overall wellbeing and outcomes.



For more information on Springbuk's health intelligence platform, please visit springbuk.com