

SHARED PRINCIPLES FOR MEASURING SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH INTERVENTIONS



INTRODUCTION

Social determinants of health (SDOH) are the “conditions in the environments in which people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks.”¹ As efforts to assess and address the SDOH increase, there is a pressing need to develop ways to measure the impact of such efforts and to hold systems accountable for progress. However, while there has been an increasing amount of activity around measurement of SDOH interventions at the local and national level, almost none of these efforts are coordinated with each other.² Without a shared set of principles to prospectively align and guide measurement of SDOH and the impact of efforts to address social need, the field may face similar pitfalls to those experienced in the assessment of health care quality and safety or community health, such as an over-abundance of measures and a lack of comparable data. Prospectively aligning measures of success for SDOH interventions will enable comparisons across demonstrations or programs, reduce the burden of data collection, and provide useful evidence to support a sustainable business model for addressing the social determinants of health.

This brief is one in a series from the National Alliance to Impact the Social Determinants of Health (NASDOH) designed to address key issues and advance our nation’s actions around addressing the social determinants of health at both the individual and community level.^{3,4} It is a call to action to all organizations and sectors engaged in, or intending to engage in, efforts to identify or impact social determinants of health. This brief describes framing principles to guide SDOH measurement development that, if adopted, can help these organizations work collaboratively to prospectively align around a shared measurement framework and eventually, lead to a library of measures inclusive of core measures. We would also encourage collaboration to operationalize these measures in the field to enhance shared accountability and shared learning. We hope that the SDOH Measurement Principles presented in this brief will be adopted not just by those organizations that are already actively engaged in developing measures, but also by the health care sector (including payers and providers), by policy-makers at all levels of government, by the social, human services, and public health sectors, and, importantly, by organizations representing consumers and communities.

Prospectively aligning measures of success for SDOH interventions will enable comparisons across demonstrations or programs, reduce the burden of data collection, and provide useful evidence to support a sustainable business model for addressing the social determinants of health.

IMPORTANCE OF ADDRESSING SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

Health and wellbeing are foundational to economic vitality, business competitiveness, personal achievement, and prosperity, and an increased level of health for all people in America is key to the promotion of thriving lives, economies, and communities. Health outcomes, including such things as average life expectancy and quality of life, strongly relate to social determinants of health, such as food access and nutrition, transportation, housing, incarceration and recidivism,

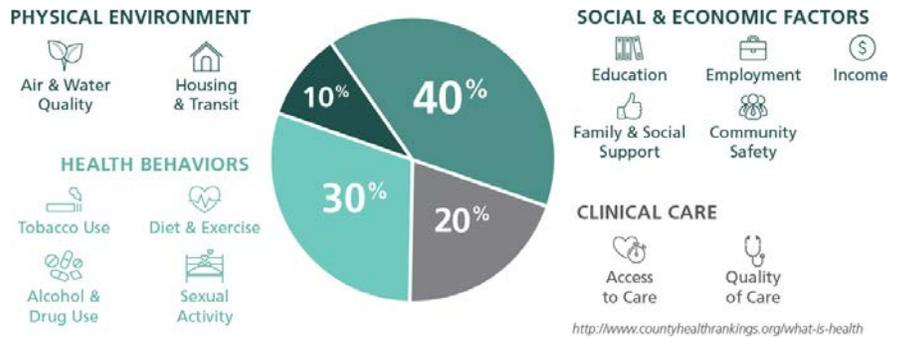
¹ Healthy People 2020 – Social Determinants of Health, at <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-of-health>, accessed 30 August 2018.

² Remington, P. L., & Booske, B. C. Measuring the health of communities—how and why?. *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice*, 2011. 17(5), 397-400.

³ National Alliance to Impact Social Determinants of Health. “Identifying Social Risk and Needs in Health Care: Promising Approaches to Screening for Social Determinants of Health and Recommendations for Continued Exploration.” 2019. Available at: <http://www.nasdoh.org/related-publications/>

⁴ National Alliance to Impact Social Determinants of Health. “Getting to Health and Well-Being for the Nation: A Call for Cross-Sector Action to Impact the Social Determinants of Health.” 2019. Available at: <http://www.nasdoh.org/related-publications/>

jobs/wages, safety, education, and other community-based and environmental conditions.^{5,6} The impact of SDOH is most striking for certain populations within the United States – including those living in poverty and those facing forms of discrimination – potentially leading to disparities in rates of illness and injury and disproportionately shortened life expectancy.⁷



Adequately addressing social determinants may involve efforts that have individual-level impacts, such as referring a food-insecure individual to a food bank. It must also involve efforts that have a broader upstream impact, like ensuring access to healthy affordable food for the entire community.⁸ At all levels, appropriate and aligned measurement will accelerate successful efforts to promote the well-being of individuals and communities.

OPPORTUNITY FOR HARMONIZED APPROACH TO MEASUREMENT

Given the complex interaction between SDOH and health status, creation and adoption of sustainable individual- and community-level interventions to address the underlying SDOH that contribute to health and well-being requires cross-sector/cross-discipline investment and collaboration. Assessing the success and return on improvement of SDOH interventions necessitates measuring and monitoring improvements in SDOH. There is evidence linking improvements in social determinants to improved health outcomes as well as non-health outcomes, such as access to quality housing or reductions in absenteeism.⁹ There is less robust evidence linking improvements in social determinants of health to meaningful change in areas such as health care expenditures. Integral to the creation of a value proposition for investing in SDOH is a common understanding of how to assess social and environmental challenges and their linkage to disease, which outcomes are most critical to an assessment of the impact of an intervention, and how to measure these outcomes.

As the policy, practice, and scientific arenas advance efforts aimed at impacting social determinants of health, a more strategic and harmonized approach will be essential to ensure that we can systematically advance our understanding of opportunities to improve the health and well-being of people and communities. Consistency and harmonization of measurement approaches will enable comparisons of efforts across settings, which will inform ongoing assessments of the impact of specific interventions, promote the development and scaling of best practices, create a supportive environment for identifying sustainable financing models, and produce compelling evidence to bolster the business case for addressing social determinants of health in a health system and across communities.

It is essential that efforts are made in the short-term to align measurement approaches so that measures and targets for success across sectors and disciplines are comparable and reporting burden is reduced. Integral to the promotion of innovative partnerships and funding mechanisms is a level of assurance and confidence in the return for the investment in improving social determinants of health (e.g., improved well-being for individuals and communities, reduced absenteeism, lower health care costs). Developing a core set of measures that can not only drive action in focused efforts, but also catalyze collaboration is an essential part of the work (Figure 1).

⁵ Bradley EH, Elkins BR, Herrin J, Elbel B, “Health and social services expenditures: associations with health outcomes.” *BMJ Qual Saf* 20(826-831), 2011.

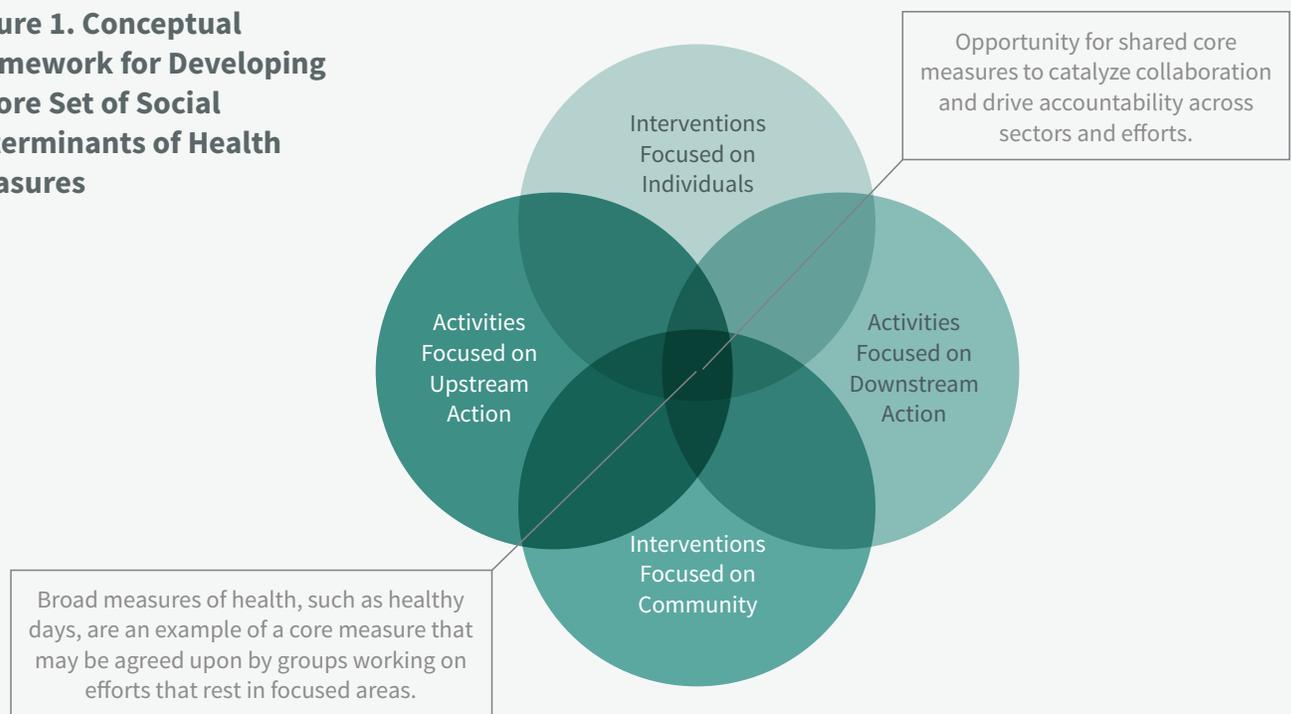
⁶ Taylor LA, Tan AX, Coyle CE, Ndumele C, Rogan E, Canavan M, et al., “Leveraging the Social Determinants of Health: What Works?” *PLoS ONE* 11(8), 2016.

⁷ H.J. Heiman and S. Artiga. “Beyond Health Care: The Role of Social Determinants in Promoting Health and Health Equity.” November 4, 2015. Washington DC: The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. Available at: <http://kff.org/disparities-policy/issue-brief/beyond-health-care-the-role-of-social-determinants-in-promoting-health-and-health-equity/>

⁸ Castrucci, B. and Auerbach. J. “Meeting Individual Social Needs Falls Short of Addressing Social Determinants of Health.” January 16, 2019. Health Affairs Blog. Available at: <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hblog20190115.234942/full/>

⁹ Taylor, L. “Housing and Health: An Overview of the Literature.” June 7, 2018. Health Affairs Blog. Available at: <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hpb20180313.396577/full/>

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for Developing a Core Set of Social Determinants of Health Measures



PRINCIPLES FOR MEASURING THE IMPACT OF SDOH INTERVENTIONS

Those working on social determinants of health are increasingly in need of clear measures to assess efforts to mitigate the negative impacts of SDOH across settings ranging from research interventions, to community projects, to payment demonstrations and to accountability expectations such as for quality outcomes. Having a set of shared principles to guide the development of measurement frameworks, the selection of key domains, the identification of core measures that can be shared across sectors and efforts, and the establishment of targets for success is critical before the field advances further.

The following **SDOH Measurement Principles** can provide the foundation for measurement alignment across sectors and efforts:

1. The Social Determinants of Health field should **prospectively align** on a core set measures, harmonized across sectors to catalyze shared accountability for success.
2. Collection of data to inform SDOH measures should, whenever possible, **draw from existing data sources** to minimize additional burden to all involved sectors, individuals and the community.
3. To encourage shared accountability and collaboration, measuring the impact of social determinants of health interventions should **balance the goals and interests of all involved sectors** including business, public health, social and human services, medicine, the individual and the community.
4. Measurement frameworks that are developed should be created in partnership with the community and **reflect the perspectives and aspirations of the individual and of the community**.
5. Measures should allow multiple sectors to assess progress through leading and lagging indicators of health and well-being.
6. Identification of social risk and need should allow efforts to **strategically identify people and communities with the greatest need, risk and/or potential for improvement**, not only support risk adjustment.



CALL TO ACTION

We are at a critical juncture in the movement to understand the impact of addressing the social determinants of health whether at the level of upstream community interventions, or as part of health system strategies to support individuals with health care-related social needs. We are calling on those engaged in work to develop measurement frameworks, measures and targets, or data sources for these measures to work together. To support this collaboration across efforts, NASDOH will work with other key stakeholders to:

1. Rally the public and private sector to endorse these SDOH Measurement Principles as a framework for prospective collaborative action.
2. Create a dynamic landscape map of ongoing efforts to develop measures related to the social determinants of health.
3. Drive the field to prospectively align around a shared framework for social determinants of health measurement and a core set of defined measures that encourage shared accountability across sectors.
4. Shepherd the development of a publicly available set of core shared measures that would be curated by a neutral party.

CONCLUSION

There is a great deal of exciting activity happening across many sectors seeking to impact the health of individuals and communities through interventions aimed at the social determinants of health. These efforts are all critical to the promotion of health and well-being of individuals and communities. To understand the most effective interventions and establish best practices for addressing SDOH, those engaged in this field must work collaboratively to establish a common measurement approach and agree upon a core set of measures that will drive collaboration and lead to shared accountability by all sectors involved in this important work. NASDOH proposes these SDOH Measurement Principles to guide the activity of entities with responsibility for developing shared measures and for individual efforts aimed at assessing impact. The nation can make the most proximate and significant impact by working prospectively and collaboratively to align our measurement efforts, and in turn, promote investment in, and scaling of, successful efforts to address SDOH.

ABOUT NASDOH

The National Alliance to impact the Social Determinants of Health (NASDOH) is a group of stakeholders working to systematically and pragmatically build a common understanding of the importance of addressing social needs as part of an overall approach to health improvement. NASDOH brings together health care, public health and social services expertise, local community experience, community-convening competence, business and financial insight, technology innovation, data and analytics competencies, and policy and advocacy acumen to assess and address current regulatory frameworks, funding environments and opportunities, and practical challenges to implementing and sustaining social determinants of health efforts. To learn more visit us at

www.nasdoh.org.

MEMBERSHIP

CO-CONVENERS

Karen DeSalvo, MD, MPH, MSc

Governor Michael O. Leavitt

STEERING COMMITTEE

Aetna	Kaiser Permanente
AcademyHealth	National Partnership for Women and Families
Cerner	RWJBarnabas Health
Cigna	TAVHealth
Funders Forum, George Washington University	Trust for America's Health
Intermountain Healthcare	

GENERAL MEMBERS

AltaMed Health Services	March of Dimes
American Heart Association	Maxim Healthcare Services
AmeriHealth Caritas	Michigan Health Improvement Alliance
Build Healthy Places	n4a
Center for Community Investment	New Jersey Innovation Institute New York Presbyterian
deBeaumont Foundation	ReThink Health
Episcopal Health Foundation	Solera
Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey	Trinity Health
Humana	Twire Ventures

STRATEGIC PARTNERS

BCBS Venture Partners