

Collecting social determinants of health data

Staff FAQs

This document provides answers to frequently asked questions. Use this document to train staff on how to ask social determinants of health questions with patients.

What are social determinants of health?

SDoH are non-medical factors that influence health outcomes such as food insecurity, interpersonal safety, housing, transportation and financial status.

How do I start the conversation with patients?

Tell the patient you have a few simple questions you would like to ask and explain why:

I would like to ask you a few questions to better understand your non-medical needs that can impact your health, like housing or food. We ask all our patients these questions so that we can better understand and support our patients and our community.

You may stop or skip a question at any time. Your responses will become part of your private health record. You don't have to answer, but it would help the hospital better serve you and our community if you do.

May I continue with the questions?

Why do we ask patients about their SDoH?

By asking these questions we can learn more about our patients and the community we serve. We can understand if patients have unmet social needs and connect them with community resources. This information helps us provide high-quality care to all our patients.

How often should we screen patients for SDoH?

Patients should be screened at least once every 12 months. They may be screened more frequently as their needs may change.

Who is responsible for completing patient SDoH screenings?

Your organization will determine who is responsible for screening patients based on the resources and workflows of each department or care area. Some examples of staff that may collect this information are social workers, case managers, patient navigators, community health workers or nurses. For example, social workers may screen patients on inpatient units, while patient navigators may screen patients in the ED.

What should I do if a patient refuses to answer these questions?

This screening is voluntary. You can record that the patient declined to answer.

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Sample responses to patient questions

This tip sheet provides scripted answers to patients' frequently asked questions.

Why are you asking me about things unrelated to my health?

These questions are designed to help us understand if you need help in areas of your life that can impact your health. Answering these questions allows us to provide you quality care. Your answers may help us better understand the needs of our community.

Do I have to answer?

No. You do not have to complete the screening, but if you do, we may be able to connect you with additional support. You may refuse to answer any question you do not want to answer. If you choose not to answer this time, we may ask again at future visits.

Will my information be kept confidential?

All information you provide will be kept private and in your medical record.

Who are you collecting this information from?

We are asking all patients for this information.

If I have been seeing my doctor for years, don't you already know this information?

Your provider may know this information, but we also know that your needs can change over time. We want to make sure we know your current needs so we can continue to provide great care and support.

How does this benefit me?

By answering these questions, we get to know you better and learn about things that may be impacting your health. By asking all patients, we get to know more about the community we serve, allowing us to better connect people with needed supports and services outside of the healthcare system.

