



SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH: WHAT GOVERNING BOARDS SHOULD KNOW

Health equity is the cornerstone of providing inclusive and patient-centered health care. It ensures that individuals, regardless of their socioeconomic status, geographic location, gender, ethnicity, or other patient characteristics, receive the care they need. When health equity is compromised, poor quality outcomes and preventable health disparities emerge.

The **social determinants of health** encompass the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age. Hospitals can advance health equity by integrating data and insights on patients' social determinants. These determinants include a range of factors such as income, education, employment, housing, and access to health care. Hospital boards play a crucial role in guaranteeing equal treatment for all individuals. By fostering awareness of the health disparities our patient population faces and analyzing essential data, we can enhance health care outcomes for the entire community.

Data Reporting for Health Improvement

Starting in 2024, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) will require hospitals to screen for social determinants of health (SDoH) data. These data points include food insecurity, interpersonal safety, housing, transportation, and utilities (a domain within the larger driver of financial insecurities). Hospital boards should ensure compliance with this new rule and incorporate general data reporting on quality outcomes for segmented patient populations. This ensures that no one is left behind in achieving their best health outcomes.

The journey towards health equity is ongoing, and regulatory attention in this area is increasing. Board members must continuously review and evaluate their organization's readiness and progress to support the health of everyone in the community.

Tips for Board Engagement

- Foster open communication by actively seeking information through board reports and requesting relevant topics for discussion.
- Utilize external data resources that provide valuable insights into community health.
- Conduct a Community Health Needs Assessment to better understand your population's social determinants of health
- Request and review data that highlights health differences between population groups.
- Collaborate with stakeholders in education, transportation, housing, planning, public health and faith-based organizations on health equity programming.

Together, we can drive positive change and create a healthcare system prioritizing equity, inclusivity, and improved health outcomes for all.

Did you know that Z-Codes can be invaluable in identifying non-medical factors that significantly impact a patient's well-being?

To capture data on the social needs that influence health status, hospitals can utilize ICD-10-CM Z-Codes, which identify non-medical factors. These codes encompass socioeconomic factors such as education, employment, housing, food security, water quality, and exposure to environmental risks.

Hospitals can track these needs by educating stakeholders on the importance of screening, documenting, and coding social needs with Z-Codes and identifying targeted solutions to improve patient and community health.

