



Social Determinants of Health: Addressing Patients' Social Health Needs



Sixty percent of a person's health is impacted by behavioral, environmental, and social conditions.

While the clinical aspects of patient health remain the highest priority for diagnosis and treatment, understanding patients' social needs can provide a holistic view of their overall health. Your patients' lifestyle choices often can put them at higher risks for health challenges like obesity, depression, and heart disease, and sometimes can lead to multiple emergency department visits. By identifying and addressing social determinants of health (SDOH), you and your staff are taking a comprehensive approach to patient care.

Social Determinants of Health

SDOH are conditions in the environments in which people live, learn, work, play, worship, and age. They affect a wide range of health, functions, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks. SDOH include, but are not limited to, food insecurity, loneliness and social isolation, housing quality and instability, transportation, financial strain, employment, and working conditions.

Identifying and Screening for SDOH and Health-Related Social Needs

Addressing social health needs alongside clinical needs improves the whole-person health of your patients. During annual wellness exams and regular appointments with patients, incorporate the screenings built into the electronic health record (EHR).

If your EHR doesn't have a screening tool, incorporate the AHC screening (Accountable Health Communities Health-Related Social Needs Screening Tool – Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation [CMMI]).

Guidance on Coding for SDOH

Guidance on using SDOH ICD-10-CM codes for persons with potential health hazards related to socioeconomic and psychosocial circumstances, includes:

- Codes for SDOH should be only reported as secondary diagnoses.
- » Code assignment may be based on medical record documentation from nonphysician clinicians
- » involved in the care of the patient who are not the patient's provider (e.g., social workers, community health workers, case managers or nurses) since this information represents social information, rather than medical diagnoses.
- Patient self-reported documentation may be used to assign codes as long as the information is signed
- » off by and incorporated into the medical record by either a clinician or provider.

Coding for SDOH

It is a best practice to document patient screening results in the EHR/EMR so you and your care team can track patient progress over time and communicate screening results to the patient's health insurer. By using ICD-10-CM codes in categories Z55 – Z65 (like those below), you are able to provide clear documentation that's interoperable across payer systems.

Social determinants of health codes are located primarily in the Z code categories below:

Z55 Problems related to education and literacy

Z55.1 Schooling unavailable and unattainable

Z55.5 Less than a high school diploma

Z56 Problems related to employment and unemployment

Z57 Occupational exposure to risk factors

Z58 Problems related to physical environment

Z58.6 Inadequate drinking-water supply

Z59 Problems related to housing and economic circumstances

Z59.Ø Homelessness

Z59.ØØ Homelessness, unspecified

Z59.Ø1 Sheltered homelessness

Z59.Ø2 Unsheltered homelessness

Z59.4 Lack of adequate food

Z59.41 Food insecurity

Z59.5 Extreme poverty

Z59.6 Low income

Z59.7 Insufficient social insurance and welfare support

Z59.8 Other problems related to housing and economic circumstances

Z59.81 Housing instability, housed

Z59.811 Housing instability, housed, with risk of homelessness

Z59.812 Housing instability, housed, homelessness in past 12 months

Z59.819 Housing instability, housed unspecified

Z6Ø Problems related to social environment [loneliness/social isolation]

Z6Ø.2 Problems related to living alone

Z6Ø.4 Social exclusion and rejection (exclusion and rejection on the basis of personal characteristics, such as unusual physical appearance, illness or behavior)

Z62 Problems related to upbringing

Z63 Other problems related to primary support group, including family circumstances [inadequate social support]

Z63.8 Other specified problems related to primary support group

Z63.9 Problems related to primary support group, unspecified

Z64 Problems related to certain psychosocial circumstances

Z65 Problems related to other psychosocial circumstances

Z91* Personal risk factors, not elsewhere classified

Z91.1 Patient's noncompliance with medical treatment and regimen

Z91.12Ø Patient's intentional under dosing of medication regimen due to financial hardship

**Not included in SDOH code category but may be used to document “factors influencing health status and contact with health services.”*

Assessment and documentation of social risk factors also effect the complexity of medical decision-making (MDM). As of Jan. 1, 2021, CPT® Evaluation and Management (E/M) Guidelines consider having diagnosis or treatment significantly limited by SDOH to be indicative of a “moderate” level of MDM related to Office or Other Outpatient Codes 99202–99215.