



Social determinants of health

Social determinants of health (SDOH) are conditions in the environments where 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. By building a framework for identifying and incorporating insights into the impact of SDOH, Optum aims to create a path to healthier, stronger and more resilient communities.



80%

of a person's health is influenced by what happens outside a clinical setting.¹

Addressing social determinants of health

Health is about more than medical care. It includes factors outside a doctor's office that play a significant role in influencing a person's health and well-being.

Optum

While there is no definitive list of SDOH, they include factors that affect our ability to be healthy, such as:



Transportation access

Transportation issues create significant barriers to accessing care, employment and elements of daily living. Helpful interventions can include subsidies, travel vouchers, public transportation passes, telehealth services and van pool arrangements.



Food security

Food insecurity is directly related to an individual's health status, and it can lead to higher-than-average use of the emergency room and lower-than-average visits to primary care. Our staff works within local communities to facilitate access to affordable, nutritious food using tools such as food debit cards, food pantries, food delivery services, community gardens, farmers markets and subsidized meal programs.



Financial security

Financial insecurity can be considered a “super” social determinant because it links directly to other social vulnerabilities, such as the inability to pay rent, purchase food or address emergency expenses. Forty-eight percent, or nearly half, of Americans do not have enough savings to cover a surprise \$400 expense. Connecting members to financial counseling, grants and credit, employment, internship, job training and education programs can address financial insecurity.



Environmental security

Environmental issues range from lack of safe public space to absence of recreational opportunities to limited digital access. We connect members to community organizations that assist with safe spaces, recreation and Wi-Fi internet hot spots.



Social connection

Social isolation can complicate mental health challenges. We address this by connecting people through local community programs, support groups and through digital apps designed for peer connections. We also connect members to local peer support specialists with lived experience who have faced similar challenges.



Housing security

We help address housing vulnerability by supporting local housing shelters, rent subsidies and the creation of safe, low-cost housing stock. We partner with local housing advocates and assist members with finding local housing programs and resources.

Any efforts to address SDOH must engage local members, families, providers, governmental agencies, community organizations and other key stakeholders in order to be successful. Optum is transforming behavioral health care by building solutions that help address circumstances caused by SDOH that our members are facing. The following examples outline our efforts.

Creating housing stability

Having a stable living environment is an essential facet of personal well-being. The collaboration between Salt Lake County, Utah and Optum Salt Lake County (Optum SLCo) has expanded housing services in that community. Our peer support specialists facilitate peer support groups in boarding homes for individuals at risk of homelessness, contributing to a community culture that encourages participation among a hard-to-reach population and encouraging housing stability. In 2019, to address the housing needs of members engaged with assertive community treatment (ACT) teams, we expanded access to housing resources by working with Salt Lake County, Open Minds and Volunteers of America to develop and create 22 additional housing units/apartments for members receiving ACT services.

We also worked with Salt Lake County and First Step House to add housing for members with serious mental illness in 2020, which resulted in 75 additional housing units. We partner with others, including Salt Lake County and Housing Connect, to assist members with housing needs. Our staff uses their housing expertise to work with members in transition from Utah State Hospital to boarding homes in the community. Recently, 31% of members discharged from Utah State Hospital received housing assistance from Optum SLCo.² For example, we often support members returning to the community from the Forensic Unit at the Utah State Hospital whose search for housing is more challenging due to stigma from involvement with the justice system.



Optum has been working to build **affordable housing capacity** across the country to help facilitate member housing stability. In total, enterprise-wide, we have invested over **\$500 million** in affordable housing funding, resulting in over **4,670 new affordable homes**.³



Andrea, an 18-year-old with mental health and developmental disability needs, was at risk of homelessness after being sent away from her home by her adoptive parents. Her provider was working with her to locate appropriate housing. Optum assisted her with Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) applications. We also worked with Andrea's provider to connect her to the emergency housing necessary to keep her safe and housed until financial and housing benefits were available.*

*Stock photo used. Member name changed to protect member privacy.

Creating SDOH solutions to eliminate barriers to care

Financial support from Optum Idaho for the Gem County Recovery Center addresses food insecurity in the region. In 2020 and 2021, our support included funding a commercial refrigeration unit and providing a stipend to volunteers for fuel to pick up and deliver food to those who cannot transport themselves to the recovery center. This support was extended as we recognized that individuals would not focus on recovery if they were worried about food. The recovery center has become a local pantry of The Idaho Foodbank.

We have also provided approximately \$80,000 to The Idaho Foodbank within the past six years, including annual cash and food donations. We have provided flyers with tips for holiday stress in the boxes of food provided to families. To assist the Upriver Youth Leadership Council with better access to care, Optum Idaho provided funding to help purchase a 15-passenger van in 2020. The van facilitates transportation for at-risk teens to and from the youth center on the Nez Perce Indian Reservation in Kamiah, Idaho.

Creating social connections and telehealth support for homeless members

To address the needs of members who are unstably housed, Optum Hawaii provided eight laptops to community practitioners to enable their patients' access to telehealth services and health education. This was part of a multi-pronged approach to increasing access to care and creating telehealth service hubs within the communities where our members reside and congregate. Members have the opportunity to obtain social services and medical support and to access a behavioral health provider in one location. The laptops equip front-line staff with the skills and knowledge to better support members by offering virtual trainings on evidence-based practices such as Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) suicide de-escalation techniques and motivational interviewing. By easing access to care, we aim to address gaps in follow-up post-discharge care and decrease readmission among this high-risk population.

Impact to members

Optum makes tools available to members to help them with SDOH issues, such as liveandworkwell.com, an online portal that provides members, providers and our staff with a wealth of information and resources. This and other resource directories contain information on transportation access, food security, social connections, housing security and other determinants of health and wellness that can engage members in healthy actions. For example, if a member types in 'food assistance,' the portal will link them to locator tools for organizations proximate to them who can assist – such as the closest Salvation Army, Catholic Charities, and Jewish Family & Children's Agency.

In addition, our local care coordination and care management professionals work with peer support specialists and community partners to address SDOH as an essential component of our service delivery by knowing which local resources are available and steering members to the community resources where they can find help with SDOH.

By addressing SDOH with a multilayered, holistic, data-centered approach, Optum helps members live healthier lives.

Optum

optum.com

Optum is a registered trademark of Optum, Inc. in the U.S. and other jurisdictions. All other brand or product names are the property of their respective owners. Because we are continuously improving our products and services, Optum reserves the right to change specifications without prior notice. Optum is an equal opportunity employer.

© 2022 Optum, Inc. All rights reserved. 11/22 WF8762847



For more information,
please contact your
Optum representative

[optum.com/
BHstategovernment](https://optum.com/BHstategovernment)

Sources

1. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Medicaid's role in addressing social determinants of health. February 1, 2019. Accessed November 4, 2022.
2. Data represents housing assistance provided to members discharged from Utah State Hospital between April 2020 and October 2021.
3. Data represents volume of investments made by Optum Bank and other Optum-affiliated entities.