SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH (SDOH)

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What are social determinants of health (SDOH)? Many of us know these codes exist but why are they important and how are they being used? These codes explain the conditions in the environments where people are born, live, work, learn, worship and play. They identify the age at which their health declines, their quality-of-life outcomes and risks.   SDOH are grouped into 5 domains: Economic Stability, Education Access and Quality, Health Care Access and Quality, Neighborhood and Built Environment and Social and Community Context.

SDOH expose wide health disparities and inequities. Examples of this might include not having access to groceries, therefore unhealthy eating leading to heart disease, diabetes, obesity and possibly cancer. Another example is safe housing or lack of education, inability to afford prescriptions, low income, or polluted water.

CDC Healthy People 2023 has 5 goals specifically related to SDOH, to "create social, physical and economic environments that promote attaining the full potential of health and well-being for all." Research has shown that SDOH plays a big role in about 30 -55% of health outcomes.

The 2023 Hospital Inpatient Prospective Payment System requires hospitals to report the portion of their population screened for various SDOH and how many are positive screens in each category. The screenings will capture health-related social needs such as food, housing, transportation, utilities, and safety. This screening will allow insight into unmet needs enabling hospitals to serve patients more holistically addressing the key contributing factors resulting in poor physical and mental health outcomes.

There is a plan to use the Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information set (HEDIS) as the tool to measure performance. Many health plans use HEDIS, therefore, HEDIS can be used to make comparisons across all plans. HEDIS will use the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) to ensure the process stays current and evolve the measurement set annually through its Committee on Performance Measurement.

For measurement year 2023, the NCQA announced new and revised quality measures for health plans using HEDIS. Social Need Screening and Intervention (SNS-E) will be used to identify and address the social determinants of health needs and encourage health plans to address these areas of concern that c could result in poor outcomes. The NCQA, the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS) and the Center for Healthcare Research & Transformation (CHRT) University of Michigan have endorsed the expansion and use of the ICD-10-CM codes as the standard model for data collection and social barrier removal.

Health care providers use Z codes to identify a range of issues related to health risk, exposures, location of care, social, economic and environmental determinants know to impact health-related problems. Z code utilization has been slow according to a report from CMS. Out of 33.1 million beneficiaries continuously enrolled in Medicare, only1.31% had claims with Z codes in 2016 and 1.59% had claims with Z codes in 2019.

The most utilized Z codes were:

Z59.0   Homelessness

Z63.4   Disappearance and death of a family member

Z60.2   Problems related to living alone

Z59.3   Problems related to living in a residential institution

Z63.0   Problems in relationship with spouse or partner

Medicare Managed Care Organizations are required by Federal regulations to conduct initial screening of each enrollee's needs within 90 days of their enrollment. The New England Journal of Medicine performed a cross-sectional survey in 2019 to examine the screening of social needs by physician practices and hospitals. The survey reported 24% of hospitals and 15% of physician practices screen for social determinants.   This study suggests that most US hospitals and physician practices do not report screening for patient key social needs.

Below are the proposed new codes:

Z55 Problems related to education and literacy Excludes1: disorders of psychological development (F80-F89)

New code   Z55.5 Less than a high school degree

New code   Z55.6 High school diploma or GED

Z56 Problems related to employment and unemployment

Excludes2: occupational exposure to risk factors (Z57.-) problems related to housing and economic circumstances (Z59.-)

Z56.8 Other problems related to employment

New Code   Z56.83 Unemployed and seeking work

New Code   Z56.84 Unemployed but not seeking work

New Code   Z56.85 Employed part time or temporary

New Code   Z56.86 Employed full time

Z59 Problems related to housing and economic circumstances

Excludes2: problems related to upbringing (Z62.-)

New subcategory   Z59.6 Low Income

New Code   Z59.61 Unable to pay for prescriptions

New Code   Z59.62 Unable to pay for utilities

New Code   Z59.63 Unable to pay for medical care

Z59.64 Unable to pay for transportation for medical appointments or prescriptions

New Code	Z59.65 Unable to pay for phone
New Code	Z59.66 Unable to pay for adequate clothing
New Code	Z59.67 Unable to find or pay for childcare
New Code	Z59.69 Unable to pay for other needed items
	Z59.9 Problem related to housing and economic circumstances, unspecified
New Code	Z59.91 Worried about losing housing
	Z60 Problems related to social environment
	Z60.8 Other problems related to social environment
New Code	Z60.81 Unable to deal with stress
New Code	Z60.82 Inadequate social interaction - limited to once or twice a week
New Code	Z60.83 Can hardly ever count on family and friends in times of trouble
New Code	Z60.84 Feeling unsafe in current location
New Code	Z60.85 Stressed quite a bit or very much
New Code	Z60.86 Stressed somewhat

CDC Healthy People 2030 will partner with other groups to improve health and reduce health disparities. Medical practices and hospitals can help identify patient needs to support better outcomes by utilizing these social determinants of health codes. It is very likely we will be hearing more about these codes related to quality reporting measures. Medical practices should begin to consider how to capture this information within their workflows.