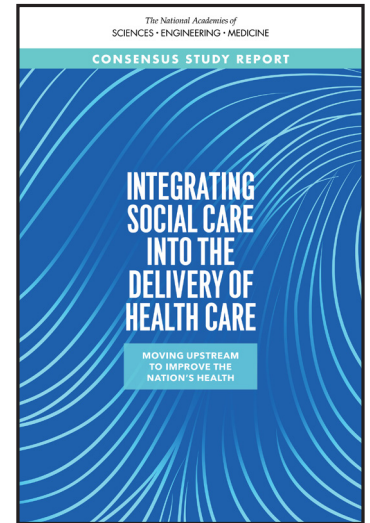


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Integrating Social Care into the Delivery of Health Care: Moving Upstream to Improve the Nation’s Health

Integrating social care into health care delivery holds the potential to achieve better health outcomes for the nation and address major challenges facing the U.S. health care system.



- Improving health and reducing health disparities is likely to depend, in part, on improving social conditions and decreasing social vulnerability.
- Five health care activities can enable health care systems to better integrate social care into health care delivery—awareness, adjustment, assistance, alignment, and advocacy.
 - Awareness activities identify the social risks and assets of defined patients and populations.
 - Adjustment activities alter clinical care to accommodate identified social barriers.
 - Assistance activities reduce social risk by connecting patients with social care resources.
 - Alignment activities enable health care systems to understand their communities’ existing social care assets, facilitate synergies, and invest in and deploy them to positively affect health outcomes.
 - Advocacy activities bring together as partners health care and social care organizations to promote policies that facilitate the creation and redeployment of resources to address health and social needs.
- The table below illustrates work in each activity using a transportation-related example.

TABLE Transportation-Related Examples Highlighting Different Social and Health Care Integration Activities

Awareness			
Ask people about their access to transportation.			
Adjustment	Assistance	Alignment	Advocacy
Reduce the need for in-person health care appointments by using other options such as tele-health appointments.	Provide transportation vouchers so that patients can travel to health care appointments. Vouchers can be used for ride-sharing services or public transit.	Invest in community ride-sharing or time-bank programs.	Work to promote policies that fundamentally change the transportation infrastructure within the community.

Integrating social care into health care delivery requires an appropriately staffed and trained workforce, health information technology innovations, and new financing models.

- Interprofessional health care teams should include experts in social care. These teams may include nurses; nurse practitioners; physicians; social workers; community health workers; social service navigators, aides, and assistants; trained volunteers; home health aides; personal care aides; family caregivers; case managers; gerontologists; lawyers; and others.
- These interprofessional team members should operate at their full scope of practice. Federal, state, and institutional barriers limit the scope of practice and the full use of social workers and other social care workers in caring for patients.
- Health care financing structures need to be aligned so that interprofessional teams can effectively address social care. The financing of health care offers an opportunity to better integrate social care into health care, but substantial barriers exist to doing so. Federal, state, and institutional barriers may limit the adequate payment of social workers, gerontologists, and other social care workers.
- Technological advances hold potential to strengthen the efforts of health care systems and social care partners to address health-related social needs.

Health sector leaders, others who work in the health care and social care sectors, and policymakers each play a key role in taking steps to integrate social care into health care.

- Health sector leaders (health system and health plan leaders), others who work in the health care and social care sectors, and policymakers should design health care delivery to integrate social care into health care.
- Social care workers should be an integral part to a team-based approach to designing and delivering health care.
- State legislatures, licensing boards, professional associations, and federal agencies should develop, expand, and standardize the scopes of practice of social workers, community health workers, gerontologists, and other social care workers.
- Policymakers and health sector leaders should support the development of a digital infrastructure that is interoperable between health care and social care organizations.
- Policymakers and health sector leaders should take steps to encourage financing of social care as part of health care delivery.

This report provides a framework and guidance for health sector leaders, others who work in the health care and social care sectors, and policymakers for moving forward with integrating social care into the delivery of health care.

- Social care workers are key to addressing social needs as part of health care delivery. This report bolsters the nation's recognition of their role and highlights the needs of the social care workforce in improving the nation's health.
- Health care professionals such as nurses, nurse practitioners, and physicians also are a critical segment of the social care workforce.
- Policymakers hold the key to improving our nation's health outcomes and addressing health disparities that represent the greatest health care challenges. This report identifies important policy opportunities to remove legislative and regulatory roadblocks to providing better care and improving health outcomes.

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