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Perceptions and Experience of Patients, Staff, and Clinicians with Social Needs Assessment

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What's going on?

According to many estimates, more than half of the variability in health outcomes can be attributed to social determinants such as food insecurity, housing instability, unreliable transportation, and financial strain. Recognizing the opportunity to more completely fulfill its mission of improving member health, Kaiser Permanente (KP) has expanded the use of social needs assessments across the organization. However, little is known about member and clinician perceptions of incorporating social needs into care and KP's role in addressing members' social needs.

Why is this important?

This assessment was conducted by the Center for Evaluation and Analytics at KP's Care Management Institute, which supports quality improvement efforts across KP by providing data and insights for decision making about care delivery programs and processes, like incorporating of social needs into care.

I felt like he was getting to know me so he could help, not just check the boxes.

~Member

Based on interviews and focus groups with 68 members and family caregivers, as well as 90 clinicians and staff in the KP Colorado, Georgia, Northern California, Northwest, and Southern California regions, we found broad support for incorporating social needs assessments into health care. The connection between social needs and health was clear to members and clinicians alike. As one physician noted, “the more you learn about patients and the more comfortable they are, you know exactly what to do for them.” One member shared, “I was happy to share. I just didn’t know where the information was going.” This concern underscores the need to develop accompanying practices that protect members’ privacy as well as methods to clearly communicate the purpose and use of social needs screenings. The table below summarizes some of the perceived benefits and concerns that clinicians and members expressed regarding social needs assessment.

Perceived benefits and concerns regarding social needs assessment

Perceived benefits and concerns regarding social needs assessment		
	Advantages of assessment	Concerns about assessment
KP Members and Caregivers (N=68)	Members believe that KP should ask members about their social needs as well as generally welcomed being asked about their needs even if KP could not assist them in addressing their needs.	Members did express concerns about how social needs screening information would be used and wanted to know who would have access to the information and under which circumstances.
KP Clinicians and Staff (N=90)	Clinicians believe that KP should ask members about their social needs.	Some clinicians noted hesitation in doing so without clear workflows to support members in addressing their needs.

What can we expect?

In summary, our assessment emphasizes that Kaiser Permanente should continue to test and spread social needs interventions, with a focus on developing clear practices to meaningfully assess and use social needs information.

He really affirmed for me that it was okay to ask for help and receive and accept services.

~Member

It is also important to explain how the information will be used to appropriately set member expectations. Our article entitled “Perceptions and Experience of Patients, Staff, and Clinicians with Social Needs Assessment,” which provides a full discussion of these findings, is available in the current supplemental issue of the Permanente Journal:

<http://www.thepermanentejournal.org/issues/2018/volume-22-suppl-issue/6856-social-needs.html>

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