OCH Environmental Scan on SDOH and Risk Factors

Olympic Community of Health (OCH) is a non-profit and one of nine accountable communities of health in Washington State. OCH brings together partners and representatives from a variety of sectors and tribes, working together to improve population health in the Olympic region, comprised of Clallam, Jefferson and Kitsap counties.

OCH is currently conducting an environmental scan focused on Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) within the Olympic region. Addressing SDOH is a key priority of our collaborative work and of Medicaid Transformation. The purpose of the assessment is to better understand the social needs in the region, the relationship between SDOH and health outcomes, and the current activity and opportunities for intervention and collaboration. An aspect of this research is conducting this survey with OCH partners to gain your perspectives on the topic. The assessment will focus on receiving your input on current activity and strengths as it relates to addressing SDOH as well as needs, challenges, priorities, and opportunities for intervention. We originally planned on conducting the assessment at in-person site visits. Given the COVID-19 pandemic and response, we shortened the assessment and adapted it to also include some questions about how social needs are being furthered by COVID-19, so this can serve both short- and long-term needs.

Aligning around Shared Language

The term social determinants of health (SDOH) is abundant in health and community care and often used interchangeably with social risk factors and needs. We offer the following definitions to contribute to a shared understanding of the problem as we collectively determine our role in addressing the upstream factors that influence our community's health.

SDOH Impact Everyone; They are Not Positive or Negative

As implied by the phrase "social determinants of health," our health is influenced by more than just medical care. The World Health Organization defines SDOH as "the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age." These conditions affect a wide range of health, functional, and quality of life outcomes. The term SDOH is often misinterpreted as being negative or applying to only select groups of people. All people however experience societal and psychosocial factors that influence health. Some factors can be protective of good health while others contribute negatively towards increased morbidity and mortality. For example, economic stability is a social determinant of health with higher income associated with better health while lower income is associated with worse health outcomes.

SDOH, Social Needs, and Social Risk Factors are Three Different Concepts

Social risk factors are the underlying adverse social conditions that may be associated with negative health outcomes, such as housing instability, inconsistent access to food, exposure to violence and unstable social relationships. These social risks have impacts on health and healthcare. Evidence demonstrates that systematically identifying and addressing social risk factors can help minimize and reverse their damaging impacts on health outcomes.

Social needs depend on an individual's preferences and priorities. Social needs differ from social risks by emphasizing the individual's priorities of which social interventions that they most need and want. A lack of understanding of the individual's perspective, could lead to a wrong or failed intervention.

Social Determinants of Health

Health	A state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.
Social care	Activities that address health-related social risk factors and social needs.
Social determinants	The conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age that affect a wide range of health, functional, and quality of life outcomes and risks.
Social risk factors	Underlying adverse social conditions that may be associated with negative health outcomes, such as poor housing or unstable social relationships.
Social needs	A person-centered concept that incorporates a person's individual perception into identifying and prioritizing their own health-related needs.
Social services	Systems and services, such as housing, food, and education, provided by government and private, profit and nonprofit, organizations for the benefit of the community.

Underlying Factors

Access to care	The ease with which an individual can obtain health services to preserve or improve their health including primary care, mental health, dental, substance use disorder.
Access to healthy food	Barriers to, and disparities in, the accessibility and availability of healthy food including transportation options and distance to sources of healthy foods/supermarkets as well as food affordability.
Civic participation	Increasing participation in civic activities such as voting, volunteering, group activities, and community gardening which can provide benefits to the community as well as participants.
Crime and violence	Exposure to violence and or abuse including being victimized directly, witnessing violence in the community, or hearing about crime and violence in the community.
Discrimination	Social interactions, events, and structures that occur to protect more powerful and privileged groups at the detriment of other groups.
Education	Access to, length of and quality of education and job training.
Employment	Unmet employment needs may be related to inability to find a job, inability to keep a job, financial compensation and lack of a living wage
Financial strain	Difficulty paying for life basics including food, housing, medical care, and heating
Food insecurity	Disruption of food intake or eating patterns because of a lack of resources. Could take the form of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet; reduced food intake; and hunger.
Health insurance coverage	Access to coverage that provides for the payments of health benefits. Protects from losses occurred from accidents, medical expense, disability, or dismemberment.
Housing instability	Housing instability encompasses challenges including trouble paying rent/mortgage, overcrowding, moving frequently, spending a bulk of income on housing and homelessness.
Housing quality	The physical condition of a person's home as well as the quality of the social and physical environment in which the home is located, including air quality, home safety, space per individual, presence of mold, asbestos, or lead
Incarceration	The state of being confined in prison as a punishment for criminal offenses. Incarceration can affect health and well-being of those incarcerated, those with a history of incarceration, and their families and communities.
Internet access	Ability of individuals and organizations to connect to the internet using computers and other devices to access services
Transportation	Unmet transportation needs encompass lack of transportation to get to any destinations needed for daily living.
Strength of community relationships	Improve the strength of relationships and the sense of solidarity among members of a community.
Utility Needs	Difficulty paying utility bills including gas, electric, oil or water