



Mahlet Zeru, MPH

Equity and Social Justice Manager

Physicians play a pivotal role in identifying and addressing issues that affect patients' health^{1,2,3,4}. In large healthcare facilities, practitioners often have the advantage of working alongside social and community health workers who provide wraparound services, ensuring patients receive comprehensive support to address their social and mental health needs⁵. This integrated approach helps patients maintain a healthier lifestyle and promotes better outcomes^{6,7}. However, for practitioners in solo or medium-sized practices, this level of support is not readily available, and this dual role of bridging the gap between clinical care and social services falls on the providers.

Physicians who take the initiative to connect their patients with social services play a critical role in addressing the root causes of poor health⁸. Housing stability⁹, food insecurity¹⁰, limited access to transportation¹¹, and mental health services¹² are common barriers that significantly impact health outcomes. By identifying these issues and linking patients to appropriate support systems, healthcare providers can foster long-term health improvements¹³, enhance patient outcomes¹⁴, reduce hospital readmissions¹⁵, and contribute to a more equitable healthcare system^{16,17}.

Fortunately, Washington State offers an extensive array of social support services tailored to meet the needs of both rural and urban communities. Whether it's housing assistance, food programs, or mental health services, these resources are a vital tool for physicians seeking to provide patient-centered care. By becoming familiar with the social support systems available in their region, Washington physicians can better serve their patients and strengthen the overall health of their communities. Below is a list of key social support services and programs:

Housing and Shelter

1. Washington State Department of Commerce – Housing Assistance
[Offers](#) rental assistance, housing counseling, and homeless prevention services.
2. Coordinated Entry for Housing
[Provides](#) a single access point for individuals and families experiencing homelessness to connect with shelters and housing programs.

3. Public Housing and Housing Choice (formerly Section 8)
Subsidized housing options through local housing authorities (e.g., [Seattle Housing Authority](#), [Tacoma Housing Authority](#)).
4. Tenants Union of Washington State
Advocacy and [resources](#) for renters facing housing challenges.
5. Rural Housing Assistance Program
[Provides rental assistance](#) and housing stability resources for low-income rural families.
6. Community Action Agencies (CAAs)
Local CAAs, such as the Opportunity Council in Whatcom County, [offer](#) housing assistance and homeless prevention programs.
7. Habitat for Humanity
[Builds and renovates](#) affordable homes in rural communities.

Food Assistance

1. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
[Provides](#) food benefits to low-income individuals and families.
2. Washington Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
[Nutrition assistance](#) for pregnant women, new mothers, and young children.
3. Food Banks
Organizations like [Northwest Harvest](#) and [Feeding Washington](#) local provide free food assistance. [Consolidated food assistance website](#)
4. Meals on Wheels
Delivers nutritious meals to seniors and individuals with disabilities. Available throughout WA – [South Sound](#), [Kitsap](#), [Spokane](#), [Yakima](#)
5. Mobile Food Programs
[Second Harvest Food Bank](#) serves Eastern Washington and other local programs
6. Senior Nutrition Programs
Congregate and home-delivered meals for seniors are available through [Area Agencies on Aging](#) (AAAs).

Social Support Services

Healthcare and Mental Health

1. Apple Health (Medicaid)
Free or low-cost [health coverage](#) for eligible individuals.
2. Washington Recovery Helpline
Free support for substance use, mental health, and gambling issues. Phone: 1-866-789-1511
3. Community Health Clinics
Low-cost healthcare services provided by organizations such as [Sea Mar Community Health Centers](#).
4. Crisis Connections
A 24-hour helpline for crisis intervention and referrals. Phone: 1-866-427-4747
5. Rural Health Clinics (RHCs)
Federally certified clinics offer primary care and preventive services in underserved areas.

Employment and Financial Support

1. Unemployment Benefits
[Financial assistance](#) for individuals who have lost their jobs.
2. WorkSource Washington
Job training, career counseling, and employment [opportunities](#).
3. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
[Financial support](#) for low-income families.

Childcare and Family Services

1. Child Care Subsidy Program
[Helps](#) families afford childcare.
2. ParentHelp123
[Resources](#) for parents, including child development and parenting support.
3. Family and Youth Services
Provides counseling, housing, and mentorship for youth through agencies like [Friends of Youth](#).
4. Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)
A free preschool program for low-income families, often available in rural school districts.

Transportation Assistance

1. Hopelink Transportation Services
[Rides](#) for medical appointments and essential errands for eligible individuals.
2. Transit Reduced Fare Programs
Reduced fares for seniors, individuals with disabilities, and low-income riders on public transit systems like King County Metro and Sound Transit.

3. Rural Transit Programs
Public transit systems like Grant Transit Authority and People for People provide low-cost transportation in rural areas.
4. Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT)
Medicaid-eligible individuals can access rides to medical appointments. Apply through the [Health Care Authority \(HCA\)](#).

Legal Assistance

1. Northwest Justice Project (NJP)
Free [civil legal aid](#) for low-income residents.
2. Clear Hotline
Legal advice and referrals for qualifying individuals. Phone: 1-888-201-1014

Utility Assistance

1. Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)
[Helps](#) with heating and cooling costs for low-income households.
2. Utility Discount Programs
Discounts on water, electricity, and garbage services provided by local utilities.

Resources for Farmers and Agricultural Workers

1. Migrant Health Clinics [List](#)
Offers medical and dental care to agricultural workers and their families.
2. Rural Resources Community Action
Serves [northeastern Washington](#) with programs for agricultural workers and rural residents.

Community, Cultural and Immigrant Support Services

1. Refugee Women's Alliance (ReWA)
[Support](#) for immigrants and refugees, including ESL classes, job training, and housing assistance.
2. Asian Counseling and Referral Service (ACRS)
[Offers](#) culturally competent services for Asian and Pacific Islander communities.
3. Tribal Support Services
Tribes in rural Washington provide housing, food, and healthcare support to their members.

For additional resources, visit [Washington Connection](#), a centralized platform for applying for and accessing various social services in Washington State.

Reference information can be found on page 19.

1. Kreuter, M. W., Thompson, T., McQueen, A., & Garg, R. (2021). Addressing Social Needs in Health Care Settings: Evidence, Challenges, and Opportunities for Public Health. *Annual review of public health*, 42, 329–344. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-090419-102204>
2. Hughes LS, Likumahwa-Ackman S. Acting on social determinants of health: a primer for family physicians. *Am Fam Physician*. 2017;95(11):695-696.
3. Sherin, K., Adebajo, T., & Jani, A. (2019). Social Determinants of Health: Family Physicians' Leadership Role. *American family physician*, 99(8), 476–477.
4. Peek, M. E., Wan, W., & Noriea, A. (2023). A Physician's Sense of Responsibility to Address Disparities: Does It Relate to Reported Behaviors About Screening for and Addressing Social Needs?. *Academic medicine : journal of the Association of American Medical Colleges*, 98(6S), S63–S68. <https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0000000000005180>
5. Noel, L., Chen, Q., Petruzzi, L. J., Phillips, F., Garay, R., Valdez, C., Aranda, M. P., & Jones, B. (2022). Interprofessional collaboration between social workers and community health workers to address health and mental health in the United States: A systematised review. *Health & social care in the community*, 30(6), e6240–e6254. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.14061>
6. Whitman, A., De Lew, N., Chappel, A., Aysola, V., Zuckerman, R., Sommers, B. (2022) Addressing Social Determinants of Health: Examples of Successful Evidence-Based Strategies and Current Federal Efforts Office of Health Policy ASPE <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/e2b650cd64cf84aae8ff0fae7474af82/SDOH-Evidence-Review.pdf>
7. Kreuter, M. W., Thompson, T., McQueen, A., & Garg, R. (2021). Addressing Social Needs in Health Care Settings: Evidence, Challenges, and Opportunities for Public Health. *Annual review of public health*, 42, 329–344. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-090419-102204>
8. Andermann, A., & CLEAR Collaboration (2016). Taking action on the social determinants of health in clinical practice: a framework for health professionals. *CMAJ : Canadian Medical Association journal = journal de l'Association medicale canadienne*, 188(17-18), E474–E483. <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.160177>
9. Lebrun-Harris, L. A., Baggett, T. P., Jenkins, D. M., Sripipatana, A., Sharma, R., Hayashi, A. S., Daly, C. A., & Ngo-Metzger, Q. (2013). Health status and health care experiences among homeless patients in federally supported health centers: findings from the 2009 patient survey. *Health services research*, 48(3), 992–1017. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6773.12009>
10. Castillo, D. C., Ramsey, N. L., Yu, S. S., Ricks, M., Courville, A. B., & Sumner, A. E. (2012). Inconsistent Access to Food and Cardiometabolic Disease: The Effect of Food Insecurity. *Current cardiovascular risk reports*, 6(3), 245–250. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12170-012-0236-2>
11. Kreuter, M. W., Garg, R., Li, L., McNulty, L., Thompson, T., McQueen, A., & Luke, A. A. (2021). How Do Social Needs Cluster Among Low-Income Individuals?. *Population health management*, 24(3), 322–332. <https://doi.org/10.1089/pop.2020.0107>
12. Hodgkinson, S., Godoy, L., Beers, L. S., & Lewin, A. (2017). Improving Mental Health Access for Low-Income Children and Families in the Primary Care Setting. *Pediatrics*, 139(1), e20151175. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2015-1175>
13. Blazer, D. G., Sachs-Ericsson, N., & Hybels, C. F. (2007). Perception of unmet basic needs as a predictor of depressive symptoms among community-dwelling older adults. *The journals of gerontology. Series A, Biological sciences and medical sciences*, 62(2), 191–195. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gerona/62.2.191>
14. Taylor, L. A., Tan, A. X., Coyle, C. E., Ndumele, C., Rogan, E., Canavan, M., Curry, L. A., & Bradley, E. H. (2016). Leveraging the Social Determinants of Health: What Works?. *PloS one*, 11(8), e0160217. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0160217>
15. Kim, J., Wang, H., Ma, J., Jeffrey, D., Mohring, S., Recher, A., & Potter, J. F. (2024). Addressing Social Determinants of Health in Primary Care Patients May Reduce Hospital Readmissions: A Quasi-Experimental Study. *Journal of general internal medicine*, 10.1007/s11606-024-08813-8. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-024-08813-8>
16. Castillo, E. G., Ijadi-Maghsoodi, R., Shadravan, S., Moore, E., Mensah, M. O., 3rd, Docherty, M., Aguilera Nunez, M. G., Barcelo, N., Goodsmith, N., Halpin, L. E., Morton, I., Mango, J., Montero, A. E., Rahmanian Koushkaki, S., Bromley, E., Chung, B., Jones, F., Gabrielian, S., Gelberg, L., Greenberg, J. M., ... Wells, K. B. (2019). Community Interventions to Promote Mental Health and Social Equity. *Current psychiatry reports*, 21(5), 35. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-019-1017-0>
17. <https://www.aafp.org/family-physician/patient-care/the-everyone-project/toolkit/health-advocacy.html>