

Identifying Family Strengths and Addressing Health-Related Social Needs

While medical care itself is important, it contributes only a small share to a person's health, with [social determinants of health](#) (SDOH) having a significant impact. Most children will experience some stress — often presenting in the form of social risk and need — before age 18. To the extent that child health providers do not take such challenges into account, medical interventions are less likely to be effective. Pediatric providers can work with caregivers to help build on the strengths unique to each family and child, starting in the earliest years. This can provide [lifelong protection](#) that diminishes physical, emotional, and behavioral health issues that follow prolonged stress or traumatic events.



Identifying a child's and their family's strengths and encouraging them to define their own needs alongside the clinical expertise of the pediatric team allows a family to inform their care in ways that are equitable and tailored to their specific situations and needs. When families are empowered to define their own priorities, addressing health-related social needs in partnership with the provider can improve the quality of care for children and their families.

This fact sheet offers strategies that pediatric practices can use to support their journey toward providing care that is high-quality, inclusive, equitable, and delivered with dignity.

Learn More at the Child Health Transformation Resource Center

This fact sheet is a product of *Accelerating Child Health Transformation*, a national initiative that seeks to accelerate the adoption of key elements necessary to advance anti-racist, family-centered, holistic pediatric practice, made possible by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and led by the Center for Health Care Strategies (CHCS). For more information, visit CHCS' *Child Health Transformation Resource Center* at www.chcs.org/child-health-transformation-resource-center.

Opportunities to Identify Family Strengths and Better Support Health-Related Social Needs

Following are strategies and resource links — including tools, trainings, and articles — that health care teams can use to identify family strengths and health-related social needs during and outside provider visits.

Holistically Support Families During Health Care Provider Visits

- ✓ **Discuss key [protective factors](#) with caregivers**, such as caregiver well-being, social connections, knowledge of parenting and development, concrete support in times of need, and social and emotional competence of children, to enhance positive child development and reduce the likelihood of abuse and neglect.
- ✓ **Co-create an [eco-map](#)**, a diagram that depicts a family’s most important personal and community relationships and resources, to better understand a [family’s strengths](#), as well as to help families identify challenges or resource gaps to address.
- ✓ **Use established workflows and responsibilities associated with identifying social needs** to connect families to available resources as part of a team-based approach and, ideally, with a warm hand-off.
- ✓ **Integrate [behavioral health](#) for children and their families** wherever possible and provide community-based behavioral health resources as needed, as seen in [Healthy Steps](#).
- ✓ **Integrate [community health workers \(CHWs\)](#), [promotoras](#), [relational health workers](#), or [family navigators](#)** into the team-based care framework who are trained in child development, have lived expertise, and/or are parents themselves, as seen in [Massachusetts Project Launch](#) and [many exemplary practices](#) in the field.
- ✓ **Provide access to integrated models**, such as [DULCE](#) or [Medical Legal Partnership](#), that offer access to [free or low-cost legal services](#) and address HRSN at the [individual](#), [family](#), community, and policy levels.

A Critical Role for Medicaid

Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) have existing [opportunities](#) to reduce some of the negative health impacts of unmet health-related social needs (HRSN) of children beneficiaries and their families. States can use [Medicaid flexibilities and opportunities](#) such as [1915 \(i\)](#) and [\(k\)](#) state plan amendments, [1915\(c\)](#) waivers, [1115](#) demonstrations to support screening for social needs, home accessibility modifications (such as a ramp outside a home), one-time community transition costs (such as utility activation), home-delivered meals, case management, and health home services, among others. States can also cover HRSN through Medicaid [managed care contracts](#).

Other services funded by Medicaid that help address HRSN of children include [medically necessary services](#) under the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment benefit as well as services provided in the school setting. The [CHIP Health Services Initiatives](#) can also be used for home lead abatement, home visitations, environmental modifications (such as air filters to reduce asthma triggers), and youth violence prevention programs.

When Implementing Social Needs Screening

- ✓ **Provide education and guidance for all care team members** on the importance of [screening with dignity](#), respecting a family’s decision to refuse screening, and understanding the risks associated with screening, particularly for families of color.
- ✓ **Work with patient advisory boards or family advisors to identify the best screening tools** for the patients and families served. Use [tool databases](#) to identify options based on setting and population.

- ✓ **Offer screening tools that empower families to identify and prioritize needs**, such as the Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative’s [Well Visit Planner](#), [PRAPARE](#), the [Survey of Well Being for Young Children](#), or other tools spotlighted in the [Bright Futures screening toolkit](#).
- ✓ **Ensure language accessibility through translated screening tools** like the one from [Health Leads](#).
- ✓ **Take a strengths-based approach** to conducting screening for social risk and needs by using the [Strengthening Families](#) framework or other models that focus on inherent strengths of child and family.
- ✓ **If screening is implemented, standardize workflows and hire trained staff** such as [community resource specialists](#), family navigators, or [CHWs](#) who can ensure health promotion, support, and resources are provided as part of the visit.

Support Staff and Engage Community Partners

- ✓ **Train, integrate, and support CHWs or other staff** who help connect families to community services or other supports.
- ✓ **Train staff in trauma-informed care** to provide effective and healing-focused health care services that can better support children and families dealing with past or current trauma.
- ✓ **Engage with community agencies and partners** to ensure that family needs are being addressed, and [improve systems and infrastructure](#) designed to help communities and provide centralized supports to providers through networks of community-based resources, such as ones supported by [Help Me Grow](#).
- ✓ **Partner with community-based organizations** that offer an array of high-quality, culturally appropriate community referral resources that can best [support families’ social needs](#).
- ✓ **Create linkages for families through local resource platforms** that aid in closed referrals to social services, such as [Cap4Kids](#), [Findhelp](#), [Now Pow](#), and others.
- ✓ **Develop partnerships with managed care organizations** to support [resources and referral](#) pathways for children and families. Consider advocacy opportunities to advance state policies that address the holistic needs of children and families.



ABOUT THE CENTER FOR HEALTH CARE STRATEGIES

The Center for Health Care Strategies (CHCS) is a policy design and implementation partner devoted to improving outcomes for people enrolled in Medicaid. We support partners across sectors and disciplines to make more effective, efficient, and equitable care possible for millions of people across the nation. For more information, visit www.chcs.org.