

Social Needs Screening in Primary Care

(MODIFIED FOR THE COVID-19 CRISIS)

With mass layoffs, isolation at home and overwhelming fear and uncertainty about the future, many patients and families are at risk for experiencing issues including:

- Stress-related illness
- Hunger
- Mental health condition exacerbation
- Loss of housing
- Inability to pay for medications
- Substance misuse
- Domestic violence and child abuse

In addition to screening for depression, anxiety and substance use, primary care teams should include a social needs screening to identify patients and families in need of assistance and referral for services.

The following questions can be asked during a telehealth visit:

- Are you worried that your food will run out before you have money to buy more? Y/N
- Are you able to get the medications that you need? Y/N
- Are your utilities, gas, water or electric, at risk for being turned off for not paying your bills? Y/ N
- Are you at risk for losing your house because you can't pay your rent or your house payment? Y/N
- Do problems getting child care or assisting children with school work make it difficult for you to work or study? Y/N or N/A
- Do you feel safe at home? Y/N
- Do you have enough people that you can talk to and feel comfortable asking for help at any time? Y/N

Basic Instructions:

Who: This includes all patients 18 and over. Any care team member can ask the social needs questions during a telehealth visit. Be sure to document in a standalone EHR form to ensure that all team members can see the form has been completed and avoid duplication in subsequent visits.

When: Complete at first telehealth visit. Questions can be asked when gathering medical or social history. If a patient answers “yes” to any question, add a reminder to rescreen at follow up visits. If negative, rescreen in one year or when clinically indicated.

How: Assure patients that the information is confidential and that this is a routine part of the health care visit. If a patient chooses not to answer, it is ok, just move on with your assessment. Use a calm, even tone of voice.

What: If a question is positive:

- Ask if the issue is something, he or she wants to address. If there are multiple issues, help prioritize needs.
- Ask if there were problems with the issue in the past or if this is the first time experiencing the issue.
- Ask how he or she resolved the problem in the past or how he or she has tried to resolve the issue currently.
- Assess level of need and provide relevant resources.
- Support patients and families in basic problem solving or create a brief action plan.
- Make a plan to follow up to ensure resolution or the need for further assistance.

References:

<https://innovation.cms.gov/files/worksheets/ahcm-screeningtool.pdf>
[Public Health Reviews: Screening for sohttps://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6014006/](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6014006/)
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