



AB 85 Social Determinants of Health Screenings

Assemblymember Akilah Weber, M.D.

SUMMARY

In order to achieve health equity and optimal health outcomes it is critical to identify, and address social determinants of health (SDOH) for individuals and families. AB 85 would ensure health teams have the resources to conduct social determinants of health screenings, referrals, and community navigation services.

BACKGROUND

Research has connected unmet social needs with poor health status. Social determinants of health mean the conditions under which people are born, grow, live, work, and age, and includes housing, employment opportunities, environmental conditions, food, transportation, and personal safety. Studies have shown that food insecurity, unemployment, inadequate housing are all directly attributed to higher risk of chronic diseases, infectious diseases, injuries, childhood development, and poor mental health. For example, food-insecure individuals are 20 percent more likely to report that they have hypertension and 30 percent more likely to report that they have hyperlipidemia than their food-secure counterparts. Inadequate housing conditions such as poor ventilation, pest infestation, and water leaks are directly associated with respiratory diseases such as asthma. One of the barriers to helping individuals and families experiencing unmet social needs is that health providers do not know how to address the needs of patients outside the clinic walls. One survey conducted by the American Academy of Family Physicians, found that family physicians want to help address their patients' needs but face many barriers in offering the support they need. A similar report recently published by the Social Interventions Research and Evaluation Network (SIREN), evaluated the gaps in social screening practices in health care, and revealed that providers that were surveyed expressed experiencing discomfort with not being able to address patient social determinants of health needs.

SPECIFICALLY, THIS BILL

AB 85 will require health plans and insurers to include coverage for social determinants of health screenings and access to community health workers. The bill would also make these screenings a covered benefit for Medi-Cal beneficiaries, since the referral to community health workers is already a covered benefit. It will ensure healthcare teams have the resources to conduct social determinants of health screenings and the ability to refer patients to accredited centralized community providers with supportive resources closest to them.

This bill will also require the Department of Health Care Access and Information to establish a working group to create a standardized model and procedures for connecting patients with community resources, to assess the need for a centralized list of accredited community providers, and to determine gaps in research and data to inform policies on system changes to address social determinants of health.

SUPPORT

California Association of Family Physicians (sponsor)

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