# **Scanning for Social Determinants**

We know that the health of our patients and populations depends not only on the healthcare they receive, but on the life they lead outside of the care setting. We understand that there are ‘social determinants of health’ such as education level, employment status, housing conditions and social support networks, which all have a significant impact.

Clinical staff already use social information in their decision-making; the ‘social history’ already forms part of our assessments and is often vital to care decisions such as discharge planning. We know that by acknowledging and addressing these economic, psychological, spiritual, relational and social circumstances, it will result in better clinical outcomes, and better satisfaction for staff and patients. This is because, identifying the socially-determined root causes of a problem can help us to design interventions which help to prevent the problem occurring in the first place, and thereby reduce healthcare activity overall.

## **To scan for social impacts, follow the following process:**

**Step 1.** Think about the population or patient group that use your service. Use the Social Determinants Table to think about which of these factors might be contributing to the problem you have identified. Perhaps this patient group have a particularly high burden of social deprivation, or perhaps your service is not yet acknowledging the social factors which contribute to ill-health, admissions (and re-admissions) or other problems such as complex or failed discharges? Think about how much each social determinants could be contributing to the problem, and try to highlight those which might be having the most impact.

**Step 2.** Where possible, find out which impacts are most important to the groups concerned. You may suspect for example that your population are particularly affected by poor housing, deprivation or by social isolation. If possible, check this assumption with them – perhaps using a quick survey or focus group. Their concerns may be different altogether.

**Table 1: Scanning for social determinants**

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| **Social Determinant of Health** | **How do these social determinants contribute to the problem?** | **How can we measure them, and how much they might contribute?** |
| **Housing** |   |   |
| **Education level, including health education** |   |   |
| **Access to essential services (health, social services, transport, amenities)** |  |  |
| **Involvement in community networks** |   |   |
| **Food security** |  |  |
| **Green and blue space access** |   |   |
| **Poverty** |   |   |
| **Employment** |   |   |
| **Satisfaction, quality of life** |   |   |
| **Inequalities (social, racial)** |   |  |