

## **Leveraging Electronic Health Record Clinical Decision Support to Connect Patients with Health-Related Social Needs**

**Background:** In October 2018, we implemented electronic health record (EHR) tools for discrete capture of social drivers of health (SDOH). In January 2021 EHR integration of NCCARE360, an electronic social care referral platform, encouraged development of systematic workflows for screening and connection of patients with health related social needs (HRSN) to resources.

We have screened 437,881 patients with 65,877 (14.8%) reporting at least one HRSN. However, successfully connecting our patients to resources is much harder. Recognizing multifactorial barriers to connection including patient, clinic, and community factors, we deployed a centralized social support (CSS) team to play the role of a key connector and focus solely on social needs.

**Objective:** To improve recognition of HRSN and referral of those who want help, we developed clinical decision support at the time of the visit to alert clinicians of the need and facilitate referral to CSS.

**Methods:** We designed a best practice advisory (BPA) to alert clinicians of patients with HRSN who ask for help and refer them to CSS. We analyzed referral patterns before and after implementation in May 2024, including the interaction between race/ethnicity, reported need, and referral.

**Results:** Since December 2022 until deployment of the BPA, 2,420 referrals were made to CSS (average 32/week). Since May 2024, the BPA has signaled the clinical team of 1333 patients. Referrals to CSS have tripled to 97 referrals/week. There was no difference in referral patterns by race or gender, but Hispanic patients were more likely to receive a referral (12.8% versus 9.8%) after implementation of the BPA. Nearly one third of patients had diabetes.

**Conclusion:** Clinical decision support can help alert clinicians of patients' social needs and guide them to a support team. Addressing HRSN, the burden of which disproportionately affects Black, Latinx, and Indigenous people is one step to improve health equity.