Children's Hospital of Philadelphia PolicyLab

Promoting Health Equity Through Family-centered Social Needs Screening and Intervention in the Inpatient Setting

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Poverty and associated health-related social needs, such as food insecurity and housing instability, can limit children's access to care and adversely affect child health outcomes. Addressing social needs should, therefore, be a priority for pediatric clinicians and health systems serving low-income children and families. Many pediatric primary care clinics have implemented social needs screening programs over the past decade, and a growing number of hospitals and health systems are now also incorporating screening in the inpatient setting.

Inpatient social needs screening and referral programs may be a beneficial adjunct to primary care–based programs because they allow health systems to reach patients and families who have limited access to primary care. In addition, children's longer length of stay in the inpatient setting may allow more time for a comprehensive assessment of families' needs and preferences, and some hospitals may have additional resources available to address families' needs, such as on-site social workers and case managers. However, unlike in the outpatient setting, families do not typically have longitudinal relationships with their inpatient care teams, meaning building and establishing trust can be more challenging. It is, therefore, critical to consider families' perspectives in determining how social needs screening and referral programs should be implemented in the inpatient environment.

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