



# POPULATION HEALTH SCIENCES

A SNAPSHOT OF A POLICYLAB RESEARCH PORTFOLIO

**IMPROVING  
CHILDREN'S  
HEALTH  
REQUIRES  
BIG-PICTURE  
THINKING  
AND SYSTEMS  
CHANGE AT  
MANY LEVELS.**

Health systems are built to respond reactively to health concerns, but improving health—while reducing health disparities—requires creative thinking and proactive planning at multiple levels within and beyond the walls of the health care system.

In our Population Health Sciences portfolio, we explore the drivers of health and evaluate potential solutions. We're investigating health insurance coverage and underinsurance to ensure families can access the care they need. We're examining the unique experiences of children with special health needs, families' social needs—which are too often unmet—and the role of local environments in impacting children's health. Addressing these issues together enables providers and systems to improve children's health at scale while ensuring health equity for all.

## POLICYLAB'S FOCUS ON POPULATION HEALTH SCIENCES



### Health Care Coverage and Underinsurance

**Children and families thrive when they can get the health care they need. Our researchers focus on the role of health insurance coverage in shaping access to care.**

At PolicyLab, we investigate how the growing cost of private health care coverage has led families to increasingly rely on public insurance programs—specifically Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)—to cover their kids. We have also documented the importance of continuous health insurance coverage for children's health and families' economic security.

Just having health insurance, however, does not guarantee access to the care families need. Our researchers also highlight the effects of underinsurance—when insurance coverage is prohibitively expensive, inconsistent or otherwise fails to meet a family's health care needs. This is especially salient for children with special or complex health needs, first- and second-generation immigrant children, and middle-income families.

Ensuring that all children and families have access to the health care they need will take collective action. That's why we stand on our research and use our voice to lift up the importance of Medicaid for children, families and communities, highlighting opportunities for innovation in Medicaid payment policies as a lever for health equity.



**Children's Hospital  
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## **Children and Youth with Special Health Needs: Health Care Access and Quality, Support for Families, and Health Outcomes**

**Children and youth with special health needs face unique challenges when it comes to health care. Meeting those needs requires unique solutions.**

Our research examines how to best deliver high-quality care to children and youth with special health care needs.

For example, we investigate how to implement new treatment protocols for asthma in the context of coverage limitations, as well as linking care across clinical, school, and community settings. We look at the challenges survivors of childhood cancer face as they shoulder the extraordinarily high costs of health care. We explore the complexities of providing care for pregnant people who have received a life-limiting fetal diagnosis, and the variation in state policy environments in supporting children and youth with special health care needs and their families. Our researchers also interrogate the effectiveness of community health worker programs that assist youth living with sickle cell disease as they transition to adulthood.

Throughout, our research looks for ways to make health care and other systems work for children and families. This includes reducing the burdens that caregivers face as they help their loved ones get the care they need.



## **Health-related Social Needs**

**Screening for and documenting social needs in pediatric care requires understanding caregivers' preferences and perspectives. Our research highlights best practices and important considerations.**

Health care teams increasingly screen families for social needs—drivers of health outcomes like housing and food security. We have a body of research that seeks to better understand caregiver perspectives related to documenting and sharing social needs information across pediatric care settings.

Our researchers are identifying methods for equitably implementing and evaluating social needs screening protocols, and connecting families to helpful resources. They offer recommendations for social needs screening and documentation that address the tensions between regulatory requirements, caregiver preferences and the practicalities of health information sharing.



## **Environment and Health**

**The neighborhoods where children grow up, the air they breathe and the houses where they live profoundly shape their health.**

In this developing area of PolicyLab research and collaboration, we examine many of the environmental factors that help or hinder children's health and well-being. The built environment and the kinds of opportunities available in different neighborhoods, for example, influence a range of health behaviors and outcomes, such as diet and sleep. Examinations of the role of neighborhood green space have linked it to lower risks of child maltreatment and involvement with Child Protective Services. Indoor and outdoor air quality connects to children's respiratory health. Repairing aging housing stock may influence asthma-related health outcomes.

To advance this line of inquiry, we are developing and advancing partnerships with the University of Pennsylvania and Drexel University's Dornsife School of Public Health.



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OUR-RESEARCH/POPULATION-  
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for full reference list and to learn more about all of our population health sciences research.

## **CONNECT WITH US**

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