**Priority**Health

# Health Equity and Social Determinants of Health

Priority Health's Bold Approach to Improving
the Health of Michigan Communities

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The primary purpose of the entire healthcare industry—doctors and nurses, hospitals, walk-in clinics, insurance companies, and others—is to make sure people stay healthy, and to provide the best possible care when they are not. But staying healthy isn't just a matter of seeing our doctor regularly and taking the right medicines. Our health is also determined by how we live: what we eat, how much we exercise, even where we live and the extent of our local support systems.

> **Our health is also determined by how we live: what we eat, how much we exercise, even where we live and the extent of our local support systems.**

These factors are collectively known as "social determinants of health," defined by the World Health Organization as "the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age." Efforts to improve health outcomes have historically focused on medical interventions. However, healthcare systems are increasingly recognizing that addressing social determinants of health is just as critical to conquering health disparities and improving care outcomes for all.

In fact, researchers estimate that social determinants of health are responsible for up to 50% of health outcomes. These factors have long been overlooked in our efforts to improve the health of individuals, especially among our most vulnerable populations. That's why it is the responsibility of the healthcare community—and a focus for Priority Health—to invest in programs that directly address the critical social determinants that can adversely affect our members' health. In so doing, we will lower the cost of healthcare and improve health outcomes for all.

## What are Social Determinants of Health?

There are six categories of social determinants of health. Each of these factors can impact physical and mental health outcomes.

**Economic stability:** Poverty and lack of access to steady employment impact an individual's ability to access services to stay healthy, such as regular screenings and support for managing chronic conditions. These factors can also impact an individual's ability to access timely, quality care when they need it.

**Neighborhood and physical environment:** Communities' physical environments can encourage healthy behavior. Playgrounds and after-school programs, for example, can significantly improve the health of children. People also need adequate housing and access to reliable transportation in order to maintain a healthy lifestyle and travel to the doctor's office when needed.

**Education:** An individual's level of education and literacy can impact their ability to control and manage their health. Limited literacy can make it harder to take medications properly or navigate the complexities of the healthcare system.

**Food:** A nutritional diet and access to healthy food options is key to maintaining good health, especially for individuals with chronic conditions.

**Community and social context:** Good health is also a matter of being closely connected with the surrounding community and the support systems it offers. The availability of support systems impacts both mental and physical health.

**Healthcare system:** Local healthcare providers must be freely available, competent and understanding of the needs of the surrounding community. Fluency in languages spoken locally and understanding of cultural factors is essential to ensure individuals feel comfortable coming to the doctor and supported by the healthcare community.

**These factors are closely interconnected and contribute to persistent inequities in healthcare.**

These factors are closely interconnected and contribute to persistent inequities in healthcare. Addressing these social determinants of health is imperative for reducing health disparities and improving health outcomes.

[1] Zonderman et al. (2016) "Race & Poverty Status as a Risk for Overall Mortality in Community-Dwelling Middle-aged Adults" *JAMA Int. Med*
[2] Ibid
[3] Moser et al. (1984) "Unemployment and Mortality in the OPCS Longitudinal Study" *Lancet*
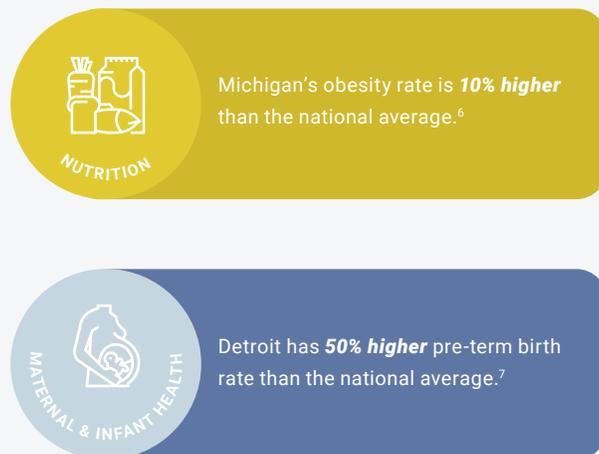[4] Holt-Lunstad et al. (2010) "Social Relationships & Mortality" *Plos Med 3*
[5] Journal of Internal Medicine.

## How do Social Determinants of Health Impact Health Outcomes in Michigan?

Designing initiatives and interventions to address social determinants of health starts with a deep understanding of the local communities we serve. America's Health Rankings, which reflects disparities among states, shows Michigan lags most of the rest of the country in several indicators, including poor mental health days, food environment, among others. These factors have and will lead to a range of intractable health problems *(see Exhibit 2).*

EXHIBIT 2

**NUTRITION**

Michigan's obesity rate is *10% higher* than the national average.[6]

**MATERNAL & INFANT HEALTH**

Detroit has *50% higher* pre-term birth rate than the national average.[7]

Numerous federal, state and local government initiatives have made real gains in employment and income, education, housing, transportation, food insecurity, and substance abuse. Meaningfully reducing health disparities will also take a concerted effort by the entire healthcare system to ensure we can collectively provide care that meets the needs of our most vulnerable populations.

## Priority Health's Focus on Health Equity and Social Determinants of Health

At Priority Health we recognize the vital role we play in improving health and healthcare in Michigan. We are the largest non-profit healthcare plan in the state, and our commitment has and always will be to our members and the communities we serve.

Simply making sure our members have access to the care they need isn't enough. Our goal is to address all the factors that affect their health, not just at the doctor's office or in the hospital, but also through access to healthy food and secure, reliable transportation to healthcare facilities—and everything in between. In short, we want to deliver exceptional, personalized healthcare that's also simple and affordable. To do that we have to deliver services to address all the factors—medical, financial and social—that matter most to our members.

We also have a unique opportunity that most other health plans do not have. We are an integrated system with 14 hospitals and 4,600 doctors. We can harness the power of this network to support our members at every stage of their care journey.

### OUR MISSION

We are committed to driving high-value care through effective and innovative programs that seek to address the most critical social determinants of health. To that end, we have built a two-pronged strategic approach to ensuring the health and well-being of all our members *(see Exhibit 3).*

✓ Devise and implement **bold, results-oriented programs** in Michigan communities that tackle social issues that affect the health of our members.

✓ Build **a strong foundation** in the data and analytics needed to understand our members' socially determined needs and **provide them with the best possible programs and services.**

**Priority Health's vision for driving health equity:**

Build *bold social determinants of health programs* for our members and our communities

Build *a strong foundation in data and analytics* that ensures we understand our members' needs and can deliver them the right services

## Health by Design: Our Approach to Creating SDoH Programs

While it is easy to see that we need to find a way to address social determinants of health for our members, knowing how to do so is much harder.

We take a simple but rigorous approach to designing and implementing social determinants of health interventions. To start, we gather and analyze a range of internal and third-party data to identify the needs of our communities and focus our efforts accordingly.

From here we design programs to address these prioritized areas of focus, frequently partnering with community organizations across Michigan and making use of the expertise of our parent system, Spectrum Health.

Examples of these programs include:

**Women and infant health:** Michigan has a 10% preterm birth rate, with a grade of "C" from the 2019 March of Dimes report card. The Spectrum Health CenteringPregnancy® program provides essential prenatal care in a supportive environment for enrollees. With a dedicated network of care managers embedded into our Children's Hospital and OB Residency Clinic, we are also able to support women throughout their pregnancy.

**Social isolation:** Social disconnectedness can contribute to poor physical and mental health. Our partner programs provide Medicare and Duals members with companionship and support with everyday tasks.

**Housing insecurity:** Housing instability, including unhealthy home conditions, significantly impacts physical health. Asthma is one of the leading causes of ER visits to the Helen DeVos Children's Hospital. In partnership with the Green and Healthy Home Initiative, we're providing support for removing asthma-related home triggers for families across Western Michigan.

Once implemented, we regularly measure each program's impact on the health of our members to ensure that it is meeting its goals for healthier lives and better outcomes. With that simple approach we have already yielded tremendous impact *(See Exhibit 4.)*

**CenteringPregnancy®**

**IDENTIFY A NEED**
Michigan has a 10% preterm birth rate, with a grade of "C" from the 2019 March of Dimes report card. This is due to a number of factors, including lack of access to reliable care, poor nutrition and limited community support networks.

**PROGRAM**
Spectrum Health and Priority Health collaborated to launch the CenteringPregnancy® program in 2015. The goal of the program is to offer essential prenatal care in an environment that is supportive, encourages conversation and fosters sharing of experience.

**OUTCOMES**
Over 435 women have participated in the program with a 91% full-term birth rate. With over 50% program participants identifying as Black, the program has also made strides in addressing health disparities in our community.

**IMPACT**
Every avoided admission to the Neonatal ICU saves approximately $38,000.

# Looking Ahead: Our Data and Analytics Journey

At Priority Health, we know that understanding data on social determinants of health is critical to focusing our efforts and maximizing our impact.

**Focusing our efforts:** Delivering targeted interventions for our members starts with understanding each member's unique needs. By participating in data sharing networks, including MiHIN, Health Net and the GRACE Network, we have been able better integrate social determinants of health into care management and patient experience.

This lets us more accurately identify those members most at risk and intervene earlier to support them, providing them with the critical care they need, when they need it. It's just this kind of thinking—and careful analysis of the data—that will ensure we can conquer health disparities for our members.

**Maximizing our impact:** We are committed to understanding the impact of our community-oriented programs so we can be sure that the investments we make in them drive meaningful health outcomes. We've introduced a rigorous internal approach to tracking and measuring the outcomes of our programs to allow us to more clearly link our programs to better health outcomes and lower cost of care.

**Our data and analytics journey is just beginning. We have only scratched the surface of what is possible and are eager for the opportunities ahead.**

## Our Vision for Personalized, Inclusive Healthcare

At Priority Health, we believe that everyone in Michigan has a right to live safe, healthy lives. We strive to deliver *personalized care made simple, affordable and exceptional.* And we know we will fall short on the vision if we do not address the factors that most impact our members' ability to experience exceptional health. This is a lofty goal. Yet for our state, our members and our employees, we know it is a goal worth achieving.

**About Priority Health**

With over 30 years in business, Priority Health is the second largest health plan in Michigan, offering a broad portfolio of health benefits options for employer groups and individuals, including Medicare and Medicaid plans. Serving more than a million members each year, and offering a network that includes 97 percent of primary care physicians in Michigan, Priority Health continues to be recognized as a leader for quality, customer service, transparency and product innovation. Priority Health is the smart choice for people seeking affordable, quality health coverage.

**PriorityHealth**