

# Knowing patients' social needs helps clinicians tailor care

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(HealthDay)—Clinicians report that knowing patients' social needs

changes care delivery and improves communication for many patients, according to a study published recently in the *Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine*.

Sebastian T. Tong, M.D., from the Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, and colleagues explored primary care clinicians' experiences of administering a social needs screening instrument among 123 patients living in communities with lower education and income who were seen by 17 clinicians from 12 practices in northern Virginia. Patients completed social needs surveys before office visits, which questioned their quality of life, education, housing, finances, substance use, transportation, [social connections](#), [physical activity](#), and food access. Clinicians reviewed completed surveys with patients.

The researchers found that the vast majority of patients (86 percent) reported a social need, even though only 3 percent wanted help. Clinicians reported that care delivery was changed knowing that the patient had a social need in nearly one-quarter of cases. This knowledge, clinicians reported, helped improve interactions with the patient in more than half of cases. Clinicians also reported that assessing social needs is difficult and resource intensive. Additionally, they report insufficient resources to help patients with identified needs.

"Clinicians reported that knowing patients' social needs changed what they did and improved communication for many [patients](#)," the authors write. "More evidence is needed regarding the benefit of social needs screening in primary care before widespread implementation."

**More information:** [Abstract/Full Text](#)

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