

# Elevating Social Determinants of Health and Community Engagement in Eye Care—The Time is Now

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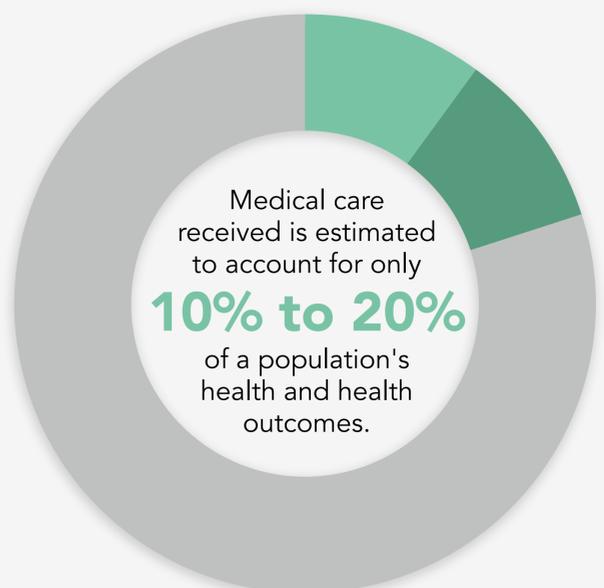
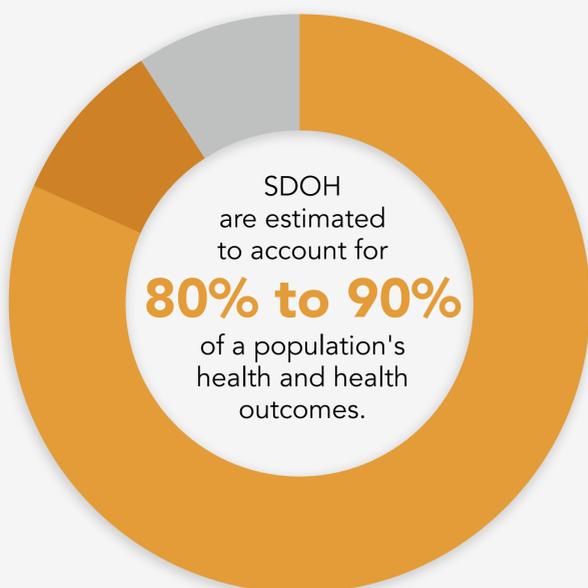
In this viewpoint, the authors advocate for all people to have access to equitable vision care and eye health, and in order to achieve that equity, modifiable differences in eye care that affect historically marginalized or excluded groups should be eliminated. This last article in a 3-part viewpoint series examines the role of social determinants of health (SDOH) and community engagement to eliminate eye care disparities.



**SDOH account for a significantly higher percentage of a population's health and health outcomes than actual medical care received.**

Healthy People 2030 identifies **5 critical domains** of SDOH.

- Healthcare access and quality
- Education access and quality
- Social and community context
- Economic stability
- Neighborhood and built environment



**It is critical to think outside of the clinical box to explore and address these determinants to improve eye care delivery.**



Recommendations from the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine include expanding eye care team members to include social workers, community health workers, and other professionals. At the individual level, it is often helpful to include patients' family members more often as part of the team. To successfully address SDOH, multisector partnerships, such as those with social service and community organizations and public health professionals, need to be created.

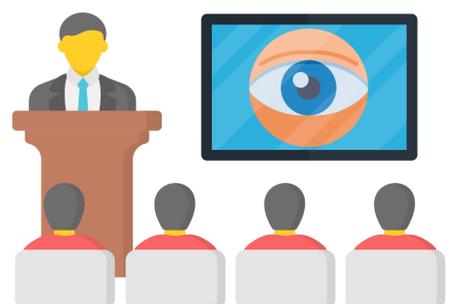


**Increasing levels of community engagement and building genuine relationships with the communities that are served will be the key to success.**

The following are some ways ophthalmologists can actively engage with communities:

## **1 Provide eye care education and eye health literacy.**

People want to learn more about eye care directly from their physician and they want to do so in trusted community spaces, such as social service agencies, community centers, and faith-based organizations.

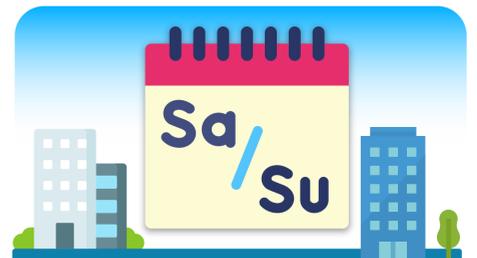


## **2 Support community events.**

There are often events, such as health fairs, food pantries, clothing drives, and block parties, for which eye care professionals can show up and engage. Financially co-sponsored events demonstrate care and support for communities and their members.

## **3 Expand community-based eye care.**

Lack of trust for the clinician and health care system was the most frequently cited barrier to care. Some nontraditional methods of eye care delivery include partnering with trusted community sites, such as local primary care physicians' offices, federally qualified health centers, or faith-based organizations, to provide in-person or remote care via eye telehealth. Additionally, expanding office hours outside the typical workday demonstrates an understanding of socioeconomic constraints that prevent some from making appointments during regular office hours.



## **4 Expand community-engaged research.**

Community-engaged research can be a powerful methodology to solve population health challenges through collaboration and partnership between community members and vision researchers.



## **Conclusions**

**Community-engaged research and community-based participatory research provide opportunities to partner with community neighbors, find out what they need, and incorporate their suggestions in every step of the research plan.**