

# USING Z CODES:

## The Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) Data Journey to Better Outcomes

What are  
**Z**  
codes

SDOH-related Z codes ranging from Z55-Z65 are the ICD-10-CM encounter reason codes used to document SDOH data (e.g., housing, food insecurity, transportation, etc.).

SDOH are the conditions in the environments where people are born, live, learn, work, play, and age.



### Step 1 Collect SDOH Data

Any member of a person's care team can collect SDOH data during any encounter.

- Includes providers, social workers, community health workers, case managers, patient navigators, and nurses.
- Can be collected at intake through health risk assessments, screening tools, person-provider interaction, and individual self-reporting.

### Step 2 Document SDOH Data

Data are recorded in a person's paper or electronic health record (EHR).

- SDOH data may be documented in the problem or diagnosis list, patient or client history, or provider notes.
- Care teams may collect more detailed SDOH data than current Z codes allow. These data should be retained.
- Efforts are ongoing to close Z code gaps and standardize SDOH data.

### Step 3 Map SDOH Data to Z Codes

Assistance is available from the ICD-10-CM Official Guidelines for Coding and Reporting.<sup>1</sup>

- Coding, billing, and EHR systems help coders assign standardized codes (e.g., Z codes).
- Coders can assign SDOH Z codes based on self-reported data and/or information documented in an individual's health care record by any member of the care team.<sup>2</sup>

### Step 4 Use SDOH Z Code Data

Data analysis can help improve quality, care coordination, and experience of care.

- Identify individuals' social risk factors and unmet needs.
- Inform health care and services, follow-up, and discharge planning.
- Trigger referrals to social services that meet individuals' needs.
- Track referrals between providers and social service organizations.

### Step 5 Report SDOH Z Code Data Findings

SDOH data can be added to key reports for executive leadership and Boards of Directors to inform value-based care opportunities.

- Findings can be shared with social service organizations, providers, health plans, and consumer/patient advisory boards to identify unmet needs.
- A **Disparities Impact Statement** can be used to identify opportunities for advancing health equity.



# USING SDOH Z CODES

## Can Enhance Your Quality Improvement Initiatives



### Health Care Administrators

**Understand how SDOH data can be gathered and tracked using Z codes.**

- Select an SDOH screening tool.
- Identify workflows that minimize staff burden.
- Provide training to support data collection.
- Invest in EHRs that facilitate data collection and coding.
- Decide what Z code data to use and monitor.

**Develop a plan to use SDOH Z code data to:**

- Enhance patient care.
- Improve care coordination and referrals.
- Support quality measurement.
- Identify community/population needs.
- Support planning and implementation of social needs interventions.
- Monitor SDOH intervention effectiveness.



### Health Care Team

**Use a SDOH screening tool.**

- Follow best practices for collecting SDOH data in a sensitive and HIPAA-compliant manner.
- Consistently document standardized SDOH data in the EHR.
- Refer individuals to social service organizations and appropriate support services through local, state, and national resources.



### Coding Professionals

**Follow the ICD-10-CM coding guidelines.<sup>3</sup>**

- Use the CDC National Center for Health Statistics [ICD-10-CM Browser](#) tool to search for ICD-10-CM codes and information on code usage.<sup>4</sup>
- Coding team managers should review codes for consistency and quality.
- Assign all relevant SDOH Z codes to support quality improvement initiatives.

#### Z code Categories

- Z55** – Problems related to education and literacy
- Z56** – Problems related to employment and unemployment
- Z57** – Occupational exposure to risk factors
- Z59** – Problems related to housing and economic circumstances
- Z60** – Problems related to social environment

- Z62** – Problems related to upbringing
- Z63** – Other problems related to primary support group, including family circumstances
- Z64** – Problems related to certain psychosocial circumstances
- Z65** – Problems related to other psychosocial circumstances

This list is subject to revisions and additions to improve alignment with SDOH data elements.

<sup>3</sup> [cms.gov/medicare/icd-10/2021-icd-10-cm](https://www.cms.gov/medicare/icd-10/2021-icd-10-cm)

<sup>4</sup> [cdc.gov/nchs/icd/icd10cm.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/icd/icd10cm.htm)