



Documentation and Coding

Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)

A quick reference guide to assist with accurate, complete documentation and coding that reflects the true nature of a patient's current health status at the highest level of specificity. Per ICD-10 official guidelines reporting and coding. *"The importance of consistent, complete documentation in the medical record cannot be over-emphasized. Without such documentation, accurate coding cannot be achieved."*

Social Determinants of Health, or SDOH, has been defined by The World Health Organization (WHO) as "the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age" and are "the fundamental drivers of these conditions." The factors associated influence health outcomes and shape everyday life for all.

SDOH codes are there to describe any social problems, conditions or risk factors that potentially influence a patient's health. According to the ICD-10-CM Official Guidelines for Coding and Reporting, **Section I.C.21.c.17**: SDOH codes are codes that should be assigned when this information is documented in the patient's medical record. This includes factors such as income, education level, and living conditions.

There are **five** domains for Social Determinants of Health Codes:

1. Economic Stability – This category relates to financial resources available and cost of living. Codes may reflect poverty, employment status, and food security.
2. Education – This category relates to the level of education as it relates to one's health. It includes codes for high school diploma, higher levels of education, and the quality of childhood education/development.
3. Healthcare – This category includes a person's access to healthcare, the understanding of health services available, and a person's own health needs.
4. Neighborhood (Housing) and built environment – This category is directly related to the community in which one resides. Affordable housing and feeling safe and secure is important to our health.
5. Social & Community Context – This category is related to how others interact. This can include relationships with friends, family, coworkers, etc., and the level of support a person receives.

Social Determinants of Health are used to analyze data and trends. They help paint the bigger picture of a person's health. SDOH can be reported by a clinician or provider. They may also be self-reported if the information is signed-off and documented in the medical record by the clinician or provider. Any member of the care team can collect SDOH data including social workers, nurses, case managers, etc.

Examples of questions to ask the patient, or the patient can ask themselves to determine which SDOH factors are affecting their life/health (often given as a questionnaire/screening tool):

- Do you have enough money to pay for housing?
- Did you finish high school?
- Do you have transportation to your medical appointments?
- Do you feel safe in your home?
- Do you have family and/or friends who make you feel supported?

SDOH Codes are billable "Z" codes from categories Z55-Z65. There is no financial reimbursement for these codes, but they help improve quality and care coordination by identifying individuals' unmet needs.

"Z" Code Categories

- **Z55** - Problems related to education and literacy
- **Z56** - Problems related to employment and unemployment
- **Z57** - Occupational exposure to risk factors
- **Z58** - Problems related to physical environment
- **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

Common codes:

Z55.5		Z56.3		Z57.4		Z59.02
Less than a high school diploma		Stressful work schedule		Occupational exposure to toxic agents in agriculture		Unsheltered homelessness

Z60.2		Z62.23		Z63.0		Z65.2
Problems related to living alone		Child in custody of non-parental relative		Problems in relationship with spouse or partner		Problems related to release from prison

Example Scenario:

Elderly client reports difficulty managing daily living tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and mobility. Client *lives alone in a neighborhood with elevated crime rates*, contributing to chronic anxiety and reluctance to leave home. *Nutrition is a concern due to limited access to diabetes-appropriate foods*, making management of type 2 diabetes more challenging. Client reports no recent falls but expresses fear of falling due to unsteadiness. *Relationship with adult daughter is estranged*, creating emotional distress; however, client notes support from several close friends in the community.

Client is alert and oriented. Physical exam reveals mild gait instability. Home safety risks noted. Mood appears subdued, though client is engaged and cooperative throughout visit.

- Refer client to local senior support services for in-home care and ADL support
- Connect with community-based nutrition programs supporting diabetic diets
- Conduct fall risk assessment and initiate home safety evaluation
- Suggest social work consult to facilitate community engagement and possible family mediation
- Recommend regular wellness check-ins and schedule next visit in four weeks

Supported ICD-10-CM codes:

E11.9, F41.9, R26.81, Z60.2, Z59.19, Z59.48, Z63.8



Applicable Code Updates: ICD-10-CM 2026 updates include revisions of codes, new codes, and deleted codes related to Social Determinants of Health. Visit the CMS website for more details: [ICD-10 | CMS](#)

References:

- [Optum EncoderPro.com for Payers - Home \(encoderprofp.com\)](#)
- [ICD-10-CM Official Guidelines for Coding and Reporting \(PDF\)](#)
- [Social Determinants of Health \(SDOH\) | About CDC | CDC](#)
- [The Role of Social Determinants of Health in Promoting Health Equality: A Narrative Review - PMC](#)

For questions, please contact the Blue Cross NC Provider Engagement Risk Team via email at BCBSNCRiskAdj@bcbsnc.com.