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Three ways to build – and scale – your social determinants of health program

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Introduction

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COVID-19's impact is unprecedented and has disproportionately impacted minority populations and low-income families already challenged with high rates of unemployment, homelessness, and lack of access to adequate and affordable healthcare. Healthcare leaders recognize that the next evolution in the healthcare experience is a shift to Whole Person Care. Research suggests integrating SDoH factors within value-based models can reduce healthcare expenditures by as much as 10% or $2,400 per patient.[1] So why are SDoH programs not being scaled more rapidly nationwide?

Approximately $93 billion in excess medical care costs, $42 billion in lost productivity per year, and other economic losses due to premature deaths are linked to healthcare disparities.[2]

At ICF Next, we believe that strategy and organizational misalignment, lack of accountable partnerships, and ill-defined metrics lead to elusive SDoH outcomes. Much like a puzzle, organization leaders, communities, and individuals must be able to see the big picture of SDoH to understand what pieces must come together to make meaningful change.

We have determined three key actions organizations can implement now to build an effective and sustainable SDoH program:

1.0 **Leverage a maturity mindset**

2.0 **Apply a participation-based approach**

3.0 **Expand measures of success**

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[1] https://www.healthcarefinancenews.com/news/social-determinants-shown-reduce-healthcare-spending
[2] https://www.kff.org/disparities-policy/issue-brief/disparities-in-health-and-health-care-five-key-questions-and-answers/

Leverage a maturity mindset
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Get specific

An organization must know where they stand to know where they are going. This requires a level of specificity and objectivity that many organizations have been challenged with when addressing SDoH.

Designed by public health and subject matter experts, ICF Next's SDoH Maturity Model is an assessment tool that provides a systematic way to evaluate readiness and program strength across the five SDoH domains[3] and the five functional factors that determine success in each domain, including: (1) strategy, (2) organizational design, (3) target audience engagement, (4) community partnerships, and (5) reporting and analytics.

5 SDoH Domains
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// **Economic mobility**

// **Education**

// **Social and community context**

// **Health and healthcare**

// **Neighborhood and built environment**

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[3] Five SDOH domains defined by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as economic mobility, education, social and community context, health and healthcare, neighborhood and built environment.

Leverage a maturity mindset (cont.)
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The five functional areas are where many organizations experience their greatest pain points and misalignments, which determines SDoH program viability and success.

// **Strategy requires specificity.** Without a clear understanding of objectives, the overall scope and the value that the SDoH program will bring to all stakeholders, there is an increased probability of program "burn out." An effective strategy is data-driven and foundational to long-term program sustainability.

// **Organizational design includes alignment.** Our Maturity Model can be leveraged at any level within the organization; however, it will quickly show where an organization may have disparate SDoH efforts. Internal organizational alignment is key to effective use of resources (people, process, technology) and implementation.
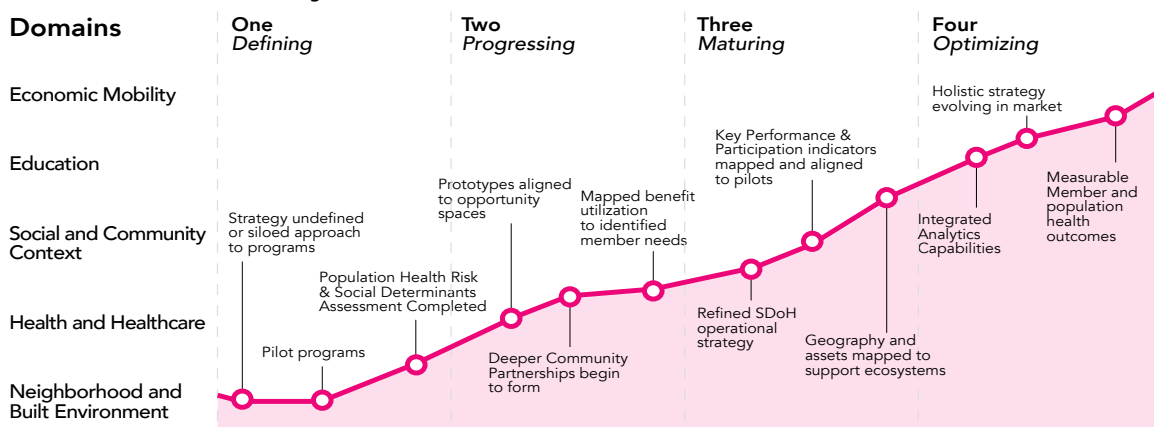
// **Target audience engagement requires understanding data and needs.** Data not only support our understanding of how to drive effective change but also applies to how we understand the populations we serve. Combining in-house data with publicly available data is a powerful way to refine and focus an SDoH program as well as understand how to engage the community.

// **Community partnerships comprise an essential component of program delivery.** Perhaps one of the most essential components to long-term sustainability is the inclusion of accountable community partners. Identifying, engaging, and collaborating with effective partnerships at the local level enables organizations to scale quickly and allocate resources to supporting organizations that are already serving the community.

// **Reporting and analytics improves accountability and understanding of progress.** Establishing an integrated reporting model from the get-go of an SDoH program is key to sustainability. Integrated reporting includes stakeholder efforts at all levels and across both internal and external partners, which is important for not only documenting successes but also understanding how to refine programs in the long-term.

By baselining the current state of a program, ICF Next's SDoH Maturity Model provides a clear path to recommending next best actions to align, design, and scale an effective program.

ICF Next SDoH Maturity Model

Domains	One Defining	Two Progressing	Three Maturing	Four Optimizing
Economic Mobility				Holistic strategy evolving in market
Education			Key Performance & Participation indicators mapped and aligned to pilots	Measurable Member and population health outcomes
Social and Community Context	Strategy undefined or siloed approach to programs	Prototypes aligned to opportunity spaces; Mapped benefit utilization to identified member needs		Integrated Analytics Capabilities
Health and Healthcare	Population Health Risk & Social Determinants Assessment Completed		Refined SDoH operational strategy	Geography and assets mapped to support ecosystems
Neighborhood and Built Environment	Pilot programs	Deeper Community Partnerships begin to form		

// ICF Next's SDoH Maturity Model evaluates these domains against specific criteria within the areas of strategy, organizational design, target audience engagement, community partnerships, and reporting and analytics. Our proprietary model helps organizations build precision in their approach, valuable partnerships, and drive participation.

Apply a participation-based approach
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Start by mobilizing from within

Once a sound strategy is established that is both horizontally and vertically aligned to address SDoH, an organization can begin to assess and implement the right partnerships by leveraging a participation-based approach to cultivate change at the population and individual levels. Mobilizing efforts through awareness and education are among the first elements in cultivating participation with internal stakeholders, community partners, and target audiences.

Participation is built on the reciprocal relationship between the organization, partners, communities, and individuals. In the context of SDoH, we are using this lens to drive awareness, understanding, engagement, and ultimately behavioral change where an individual internalizes the linkages between SDoH factors and his or her own health. Leveraging a participation-based approach can empower and equip communities with the resources and opportunities they need to achieve overall health and well-being.

Participation is achieved when the affinity a person has for a brand or cause eclipses the threshold to become actively loyal.

PARTICIPATION

Through participation we are able to boost loyalty, generate advocacy, & enable people to share in a brand's identity.

EXPERIENCE

It begins with awareness and moves customers along a journey to an experience.

Moving communities and individuals up the participation curve from experience and engagement to advocacy and identity requires a human-centered, multi-channel approach. This means identifying when and where to best reach individuals. Meeting individuals where they are and providing them with the tools they need to achieve better health outcomes is key to success.

Participation is built on reciprocal, two-way relationships between the brand or organization and four core groups: customers, colleagues, citizens, and communities.

Each of these audiences may require a different path, but by embracing an ongoing feedback loop that we actually listen to, participation paves the way for meaningful impact and a host of sustainable business outcomes.
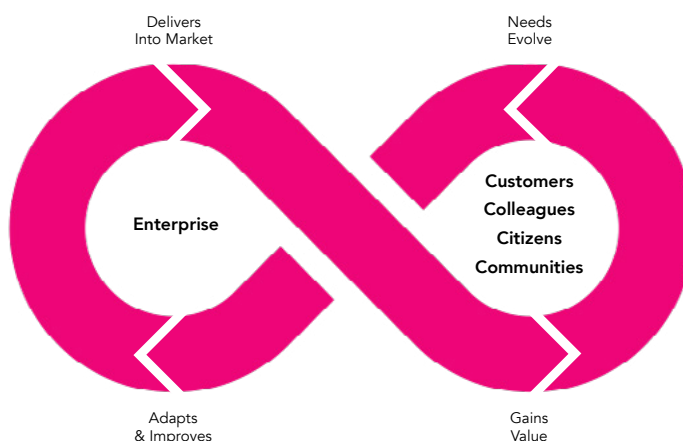
Embracing the feedback from communities and partners helps refine how an organization creates value and continues to support individuals in their journey to whole health.

Expand measures of success

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Consider the whole

Defining success for SDoH programs has been challenging. Most studies focus on the correlation of addressing SDoH and impacts to healthcare costs. However, this is still a transactional narrative and while healthcare cost reduction is indeed an outcome, SDoH programs have far reaching impacts that must be considered.

If we are to move from transactional to relationship-based experiences in healthcare we need to consider how SDoH programs affect the whole at the macro and micro levels. An effective SDoH program built around improving population health should be evaluated not just on cost reduction but also on its impact to the whole care ecosystem. Below are a few questions to consider include as part of a holistic evaluation:

// **How was individual quality of life impacted?**

// **Did the program improve environmental sustainability?**

// **Are health insurance members more engaged?**

// **Did member retention increase?**

// **Do individuals feel empowered and equipped to address factors impacting their health and well being?**

// **Do my employees feel a greater sense of purpose as a result of these initiatives?**

Pro tip: recommended first steps

ICF Next is ready to help clients innovate, build alignment, and implement the right programs to generate sustainable health outcomes. For those ready to move forward, the following steps can help get the ball rolling:

// **SDoH Maturity Model Assessment**

What this is: Establishes your baseline for SDoH programs and provides specific recommendations for next best action.

How you'll use it: Build organizational alignment and inform strategy, investment, and action plan.

// **Concept prototypes and activation plans**

What this is: Strategy refinement and program development that engages all functional areas and fosters collaboration, resulting in a revised operational strategy that incorporates SDoH.

How you'll use it: Inform plans and scaled market implementations to bring your vision to life.

// **Design-thinking innovation workshops**

What this is: An accelerated problem-solving program that fosters collaboration and team alignment around member needs in order to drive rapid progress via co-creation.

How you'll use it: Develop and test new ideas in market.

// **Program execution**

What this is: Qualitative and quantitative data and analytic review to finalize a holistic, human-centered strategic plan that promotes member and population health.

How you'll use it: Market delivery of scaled SDoH programs.

Closing thoughts

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2020's global pandemic, political landscape, and reawakening of social consciousness has uncovered vulnerabilities and challenges within our society and public infrastructure. So it is with great urgency that healthcare leaders and organizations in the public and private sector develop a strategy that not just addresses SDoH but integrates it into the core of the business in an actionable and sustainable way.

Now is the time to accelerate integrated, value-based healthcare solutions that consider all aspects of an individual's health and well-being. Resilient leaders, organizations, and communities will recognize this as an opportunity to enact transformational change and those that do will reap the reward of not only decreased costs but more importantly, positively impacting individual lives.

About the Author

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Sheila Yahyazadeh is a healthcare strategist and policy wonk with 10+ years of experience working with the federal government and commercial sector clients on health program and policy implementation, marketing, and customer experience.

She currently leads a portfolio of work for a Fortune 50 company, which is focused on reaching Medicaid and the uninsured population. Leveraging her policy expertise, analytics, and business consulting acumen she has brought key insights and human-centered design solutions to help clients better reach the populations they serve, create value, and yield positive health outcomes. She is currently researching the impact and scalability of digitally enabled, integrative healthcare models and driving strategies for care in a COVID era.

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