



# Addressing food insecurity to advance health equity

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In the growing movement to advance health equity, there has also been a renewed focus on addressing social determinants of health (SDOH). And rightfully so; the two are closely linked. According to [Healthy People 2020](#), there are five key areas to SDOH, each of which has its own set of underlying factors:

- Economic stability
- Education
- Social and community context
- Health and healthcare
- Neighborhood and built environment

Economic stability includes employment, food insecurity, housing instability, and poverty. While food insecurity has been on the decline since 2011, **10.2% of households** in the US had food insecurity at some point in 2021. Further, **32.1% of households** with income below the Federal poverty line were food insecure, with rates substantially higher than the national average for single-parent and Black and Hispanic households.



## Why it matters

Studies show that food insecurity is directly related to chronic illness. **One study** from the USDA showed that lower food security was associated with a higher probability of having any of a list of chronic diseases, including hypertension, coronary heart disease, hepatitis, stroke, cancer, asthma, diabetes, arthritis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and kidney disease.

The issue becomes cyclical, with food insecurity causing health issues, which in turn raise healthcare costs, which makes individuals more financially insecure. Estimates show that food-insecure adults have an additional **\$1,834 in annual healthcare expenditures**.

When you're already having trouble affording food, how do you afford an additional \$1,800 per year in medical expenses? The answer is likely that you don't.

## Taking action

For the first time in more than 50 years, the Biden-Harris Administration held the **White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health**. With a goal of ending hunger and increasing healthy eating and physical activity by 2030, the White House has announced an \$8 billion package of actions that business, civic, academic, and philanthropic leaders will take to end hunger and reduce diet-related disease in the US. With an estimated **\$52.9 billion** in excess healthcare expenditures associated with food insecurity annually, the plan to eliminate hunger in this country could have an exponential impact on advancing health equity.

While the announcement from the White House is significant, health plans don't have to wait to start addressing food insecurity. The first step is knowing who your plan members are. SameSky Health's CultureGuide™ solution can help plans understand and engage with members in the way they prefer. Once you know what issues members are facing, there are many organizations that can help address SDOH in partnership with health plans, healthcare providers, and community-based organizations. For example, our friends at **Wellth** help address SDOH through care adherence. By paying incentives to members for following their care plans, Wellth is empowering members to address their basic needs while simultaneously improving health outcomes. **findhelp**'s social care network is also used by more than 400 of the largest health plans, hospital systems, government municipalities, educational institutions, and cause organizations to address SDOH.

“We can do so much more when we work together,” says SameSky Health Founder and CEO, Abner Mason. “The first step is knowing who your members are and engaging them with their interests and needs in mind. Once you understand your member population, you can connect them to the services they need and ultimately help them improve their health outcomes and close the gap in health disparities.”

### **For further consideration**

As part of our recurring series of discussions on advancing health equity, *Under the Same Sky*, Abner Mason chatted with Wellth CEO and Co-Founder Matt Loper (check-out the session [here](#)), as well as findhelp Founder and CEO, Erine Gray (review that session [here](#)). Want to join us for these regular discussions? Follow [SameSky Health on LinkedIn](#).