

Statement on Social Determinants of Health

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WONCA welcomes the Director General Report on Social Determinants of Health (SDOH), and highlights its importance. The COVID-19 Pandemic has unmasked severe inequities often linked to poverty, quality of education, food insecurity, access to transportation, affordable housing, unemployment, maintenance of basic utilities, violence, and public safety. In addition, power relationships across economic, political, and cultural dimensions, and systemic, durable, and persistent racism, discrimination, and other forms of oppression have resulted in severe inequities in COVID19 outcomes.

Family doctors have a leadership role in identifying and addressing issues that affect patients beyond the clinical setting. They often incorporate assessment tools for SDOH into patient care. Screening allows a proactive approach to address vulnerabilities and barriers, trigger interventions, and implement timely referral and follow-up, helping patients access services within their communities and connecting them to needed services such as food, housing, and transportation.

The initiation of SDOH screening in medical practice has to be integrated into the workflow, and involves a team-based approach that includes community health workers, social workers, and community -based organizations - so that practices can engage and empower communities to address needs, decrease health disparities, and advocate for public policies.

We urge member states to enhance the possibility of a SDOH approach through 1. electronic connectivity and 2. the support of interdisciplinary primary health care teams working with the community, and 3. wrapping quarantine and isolation support services such as paid leave, rent and utilities support, transportation to health services-or home health, and food security around those diagnosed with COVID 19 who need these important services.