

What You Need to Know About the Social Determinants Accelerator Act

What is the Social Determinants Accelerator Act?

The Social Determinants Accelerator Act (SDAA) will catalyze cross-sector, intergovernmental collaborations to strengthen the capacity of all levels of government to use existing resources to improve health and social outcomes for Medicaid populations. The Act will provide state and local officials with additional capacity to address the needs of the whole person by coordinating health and social services programs to address social determinants of health – such as healthy food and nutrition, healthy and stable housing, workforce preparation, high quality education, and reliable transportation.

The Act creates two complementary mechanisms:

- *A federal interagency, intergovernmental “Social Determinants Accelerator Council.”* The Council, overseen by the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) in coordination with the Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), will include program experts from federal agencies including other components of HHS, Housing and Urban Development, Agriculture, and Labor, as well as from state and local government, the private sector, and community-based organizations. The Council will assist states and localities address social determinants by identifying federal resources, authorities, and strategies for braiding and blending funds and designing rigorous evaluations to learn what practices are most effective.
- *Up to \$25 million in planning grants to state, local, and tribal governments to develop Social Determinants Accelerator Plans.* The CMS Administrator will make up to 25 grants through a competitive process. Initial applications will identify a high-need Medicaid population to receive integrated services, identify the outcomes to be achieved through cross-sector coordination and use of evidence-based interventions, and include a plan for linking data across programs and evaluating the interventions.

Why do we need this legislation?

The Social Determinants Accelerator Act addresses several key problems that impede government capacity to improve health and social outcomes of low-income populations.

- *It is no one’s job in the federal government to help states and localities make sense of confusing and conflicting rules issued by separate agencies and programs.* Many administrators of state and local health and social services programs find the greatest challenge to implementing high-impact innovations is the difficulty of wading through the fragmented, complex rules established by separate federal programs and dense government-wide grant and financial reporting requirements. While some pilot programs support innovation on a piecemeal basis, there are no institutionalized mechanisms to assist states and localities coordinate innovations across a range of federal health and social services programs.
 - *SDAA’s solution:* The Social Determinants Accelerator Council, led by the Secretary of Health and Human Services, will be accountable for helping states, localities and tribes navigate existing program requirements and take advantage of existing opportunities to better coordinate across programs.

- While research shows that economic and social conditions have a powerful impact on health and well-being, there is a need for stronger evidence about which preventive non-medical interventions result in improved health and social outcomes that can reduce downstream medical costs for the individuals served. A recent [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation supported review](#) found that most evaluations of promising interventions have used weak study designs that produced inconclusive results.
 - *SDAA's solution:* States and localities that receive Social Determinants Accelerator Grants will develop rigorous evaluation designs and data-linkage strategies to generate strong evidence about the impact of their proposed interventions.

Who is eligible to receive grants?

State, local, or Tribal health or human services agencies are eligible to receive grants. Applicants must demonstrate the support of relevant parties across state, local or tribal jurisdictions. At least 20 percent of the funding will be reserved for grants serving rural populations if there are sufficient eligible applicants.

What Can Social Determinants Accelerator Grants Fund?

Grants to state, local, and tribal governments will be used to develop a Social Determinants Accelerator Plan by: (1) convening and coordinating with relevant government entities and stakeholders; (2) identifying high-need Medicaid subpopulations who will benefit from the plan; (3) engaging qualified researchers to advise on evaluation design; (4) collaborating with the CMS Administrator on the development of the plan; and (5) preparing a final plan for submission to CMS.

What Must a Social Determinants Accelerator Plan Include?

State, local and tribal governments that receive planning grants will develop a Social Determinants Accelerator Plan that includes: (1) the target population that will benefit from the plan; (2) the interventions or approaches planned and the evidence supporting them; (3) the objectives and outcome goals, including a health outcome and a social outcome; (4) a plan for linking data across programs to enable service coordination and evaluation; (5) the governmental and non-governmental organizations that will participate in implementation; (6) the funding sources to be used; (7) the financial incentives that may be provided, including outcome-focused contracting approaches; (8) the statutory and regulatory authorities, including waiver authorities, that will be leveraged; (9) considerations that will enhance the impact, scalability, or sustainability of the proposed interventions or approaches; (10) an evaluation plan to measure the impact on outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and return on investment; and (11) precautions for ensuring that vulnerable populations will not be denied access to Medicaid or essential services.

How Will the Council Help States, Localities, and Tribes?

The Social Determinants Accelerator Council will identify federal authorities and opportunities available to states and localities to improve coordination of health and social services programs that may be unknown or underutilized and will make this information publicly available. In addition, it will support effective implementation of the Social Determinants Accelerator Grants by: (1) providing targeted technical assistance to state, local and tribal grant recipients to help them identify statutory and regulatory pathways to implement their plans and identify funding sources; and (2) disseminating evaluation guidelines and standards to assist grantees in developing strong evaluation plans.

To help ensure that the Council is responsive to state and local needs, the Council will seek state and local feedback on how to improve its technical assistance and include these findings in its annual report to

Congress. It will also coordinate its activities with other cross-agency initiatives, such as the Social Impact Partnerships to Pay for Results Act administered by the Department of the Treasury.

What Is the Timeline?

The Council will convene within 60 days of enactment of the Act to develop a schedule and implementation plan. Within six months of enactment, the CMS Administrator will award grants to state, local, and tribal applicants selected through a competitive process.

What Does This Mean for You?

The Act will accelerate progress by trailblazing jurisdictions and organizations that are building cross-sector partnerships to address social determinants of health, such as healthy stable housing, healthy food and nutrition, reliable transportation, workforce development and high-quality education. Jurisdictions and organizations that stand to benefit the most from SDAA by receiving grants are those that begin collaborating now to explore promising cross-sector interventions and approaches that could potentially be financed with existing government resources, whose impact on health and social outcomes can be measured and rigorously evaluated.

All jurisdictions that are developing cross-sector partnerships involving health and social services programs, regardless of whether they apply for or receive a grant, will be able to benefit from the public reports and content created by the Council as well as the knowledge generated by grantees about how to coordinate existing programs to effectively address social determinants.