



Aligning for Health

2021 Year in Review

TO: Aligning for Health Members

FROM: Aligning for Health

DATE: December 9, 2021

RE: 2021 Year in Review

We thank you for your continued support, guidance, and participation over the past year. We are pleased to have achieved significant progress on the following 2021 objectives:

- Continue to grow the influence of Aligning for Health among policymakers in light of dramatically elevated social needs amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic;
- Shape discussions in Washington around social determinants of health – serving as a conduit for meaningful bipartisan interactions on social determinants, helping ensure that national priorities and interests move toward meaningful, constructive action; and
- Advance policy ideas, including legislation and/or regulation that empowers health organizations to advance health equity by addressing both health and social needs.

Below, we provide an overview of our 2021 accomplishments. We separately outline our policy and advocacy objectives for 2022 in the 2022 Goals and Key Deliverables document.

Advocacy

Over the course of the past year, Aligning for Health has focused on supporting, advancing, and introducing social determinants legislation, including the following bills:

- **Social Determinants Accelerator Act of 2021**
 - o The Social Determinants Accelerator Act of 2021 ([H.R. 2503/S. 3039](#)) is a bicameral, bipartisan bill that was re-introduced in 2021 by Representatives Bustos (D-IL), Cole (R-OK), McGovern (D-MA), and Mullin (R-OK), and by Sens. Young (R-IN) and Stabenow (D-MI).
 - o The bill would provide planning grants to states to establish Social Determinants Accelerator Plans – evidence-based cross-sector and locally-driven plans to address social determinants for Medicaid populations. Additionally, the program would establish a federal inter-agency Council responsible for making the grants, providing targeted technical assistance and oversight, and evaluating the success of the program.
 - o SDAA is widely recognized as one of the leading SDOH pieces of legislation, and has served as a catalyst for dialogue and policymaking on the Hill:
 - There are now 47 bipartisan cosponsors in the House and three bipartisan cosponsors in the Senate;
 - Committee staff have been engaged on this and other opportunities to address social needs and health disparities, including by holding a legislative hearing and subsequent markups on advancing SDOH legislation that included consideration of SDAA;

- The bill was included in a markup of 19 pieces of legislation by the House Energy & Commerce Committee, Subcommittee on Health in July 2021, and was voted favorably to advance out of Subcommittee to the full Committee;
 - Aligning for Health has cultivated over 115 [endorsing organizations](#), many of whom have sent letters of support for this legislation to Congress;
 - Successful advocacy has led to the inclusion of key components of the bill in annual appropriations, including:
 - **Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21) Appropriations** – The FY21 appropriations legislation Labor-HHS-Education [report language](#), which Congress passed on December 21, 2020, included \$3M in funding to the CDC to establish a Social Determinants of Health Pilot Program responsible for granting funding to states and local communities to establish Social Determinants of Health Accelerator Plans. The report language also established a cross-agency Social Determinants of Health Council.
 - **CDC [Closing the Gap with Social Determinants of Health Accelerator Plans grants](#)**, which resulted from the above report language. The CDC funded [20 recipients](#) to develop multi-sector Accelerator Plans that lead to improved chronic disease outcomes among persons experiencing health disparities and inequities.
 - **President Biden’s FY22 [Discretionary Budget Request](#)** included \$153M for CDC’s Social Determinants of Health program, a \$150M increase over FY21, to support states and territories in improving health equity and data collection for racial and ethnic populations.
 - **FY22 Appropriations** - Labor-HHS-Education [report language](#), which passed the House in August, matched President Biden’s request of \$153M for CDC’s Social Determinant of Health program, a portion of which would continue to go towards Social Determinants Accelerator Grants. The Committee also included instructions for HHS to continue to implement the Social Determinants Accelerator Council, as was included by reference in the FY21 Appropriations Report. The Senate Labor-HHS-Education [appropriations bill](#) also proposes to provide \$153M to CDC’s SDOH program, but has not yet passed the Senate.
- **Leveraging Integrated Networks in Communities (LINC) to Address Social Needs Act**
 - The LINC to Address Social Needs Act ([S. 509/H.R. 6072](#)) is a bipartisan, bicameral bill introduced by Sens. Sullivan (R-AK) and Murphy (D-CT) and in by Reps. Kildee (D-MI), Walorski (R-IN), Blunt Rochester (D-DE) and Hudson (R-NC).
 - The bill would provide \$150M in funding to state-designated entities to establish or enhance existing community referral and integration network models to better coordinate health and social services.
 - We expect this bill to catalyze a new wave of dialogue around social need referral networks among health policy experts and policymakers. We have worked closely with sponsoring offices, Committees of Jurisdiction, HHS, and numerous stakeholders and state officials in developing the legislation and shaping the bill language.

- Aligning for Health also held a webinar to drum up excitement and support for the bill prior to its introduction, which featured remarks from the Senate legislative sponsors and other experts in the field (additional information below).
- **Other Endorsed Legislation**
 - AFH endorsed and/or liaised with offices advancing social determinants bills, including the **Social Determinants for Moms Act** ([H.R. 943/S. 851](#)), **Kira Johnson Act** ([H.R. 1212/S. 1042](#)), **Moms Matter Act** ([H.R. 909/S. 484](#)), **IMPACT to Save Moms Act** ([H.R. 950/S. 334](#)), **Social Determinants Accelerator Act** ([H.R. 2503/S. 3039](#)), **LINC to Address Social Needs Act** ([S. 509/H.R. 6072](#)), **Care That's Fair Act** ([H.R. 4554](#)), **Improving Social Determinants of Health Act** ([H.R. 379/S. 104](#)), **CARING for Social Determinants of Health Act** ([H.R. 3894](#)), **Social Determinants of Health Data Analysis Act** ([H.R. 4026](#)), and the **Addressing Social Determinants in Medicare Advantage Act** ([H.R. 4074](#)).

Aligning for Health has worked to educate and build momentum in Congress and the Administration to advance social determinants legislation and policies, including by:

- **Advocating for Legislative Hearing on SDOH –**
 - Aligning for Health advocated for majority and minority Committee staff to advance social determinants legislation by holding a **House Energy & Commerce hearing** on social determinants. The Energy & Commerce Committee, Subcommittee on Health held a legislative hearing on legislation to [advance equity and public health](#) in June 2021 and subsequent Subcommittee [markup](#) of 19 pieces of legislation in July 2021. The Committee considered legislation that would provide guidance and funding, and to catalyze activities, to address SDOH and maternal health.
- **Supporting the Launch of the Congressional Social Determinants of Health Caucus**
 - Aligning for Health supported the development and launch of the bipartisan Congressional Social Determinants of Health Caucus, which officially launched in the House in July 2021. We supported this launch and continue to support the work of the Caucus by:
 - Recruiting legislative co-leads to lead this effort in the House and working with Congressional staff in preparation to launch the Caucus;
 - Conducting outreach to House offices encouraging key leaders in the SDOH space to join the Caucus, leading to 30 members as of December 2021;
 - Executing the development and maintenance of the Caucus [website](#), including all content and design elements;
 - Providing supportive logistics, speaker recruitment, and content development for the Caucus launch webinar and October 2021 briefing on transportation as a social determinant; and
 - Assisting with the release of a public RFI that the Caucus issued in July,

- **Informing policymakers on key committees in Congress and key agencies within the Administration** of relevant SDOH opportunities in response to legislative hearings and requests for information, including:
 - o CMS, on [accelerating adoption of standards related to social risk data](#)
 - o House Energy & Commerce Committee, Subcommittee on Health, on [advancing SDOH legislation that improves cross-sector coordination and data collection/exchange](#)
 - o House Energy & Commerce Committee, Subcommittee on Health, on [advancing the Social Determinants Accelerator Act out of committee](#)
 - o White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB), on [advancing equity and support for underserved communities through government](#)
 - o Congressional SDOH Caucus, on [challenges and opportunities in addressing SDOH](#)
 - o HHS Office of Civil Rights (OCR), [in support of the HIPAA NPRM provisions to remove barriers to coordinated care](#)
 - o CMS, [welcoming](#) new CMS Administrator Chiquita Brooks La-Sure.

Aligning for Health has maintained an ongoing dialogue with Administration officials on social determinants policy and has shared information with the Administration on SDOH legislation (including SDAA and LINC to Address Social Needs Act), leveraging social determinants of health data and developing community integrated networks.

Thought Leadership & Communications

- Webinars

- o Aligning for Health held or helped facilitate several widely attended webinars this year, highlighting legislative action to address social needs and advance health equity:
 - Aligning for Health held a webinar in February 2021 for the introduction of the LINC to Address Social Needs Act in the Senate. Over 400 individuals registered for this event, which featured videos from bill sponsors Sens. Dan Sullivan (R-AK) and Chris Murphy (D-CT) on the importance of the bill. The event also featured a panel of experts in health equity and SDOH to discuss cross-sector initiatives that better coordinate health and social services.
 - Aligning for Health helped support the launch of the Congressional Social Determinants of Health Caucus through advertising and moderating a launch webinar event in July 2021. The event featured remarks from the Caucus co-leads, as well as remarks from panelists on the value this Caucus will bring to addressing SDOH from the health and community-based organization perspective. The event was attended by over 700 participants and drummed up widespread excitement and support for the Caucus.
 - Aligning for Health supported the Caucus in its first briefing event in October 2021, called “Expanding Access to Transportation to Advance Health.” The briefing featured Caucus members and panelists from across sectors on best practices and models around transportation that are working to address social needs. Aligning for Health identified and convened speakers for this event, helped advertise and invite participants to the briefing, and moderated the event.

- All of the webinars attracted significant participation from a wide cross-section of individuals from the Hill, the Administration, state and local governments, health care payers, providers and health systems, advocacy organizations, think tanks, and community based organizations across the country.
- **Speaking Engagements**
 - Aligning for Health also had the opportunity to participate in many gatherings, panels, and conferences to share our work on SDOH and health equity, including:
 - Ongoing Brookings Institution [Braiding and Blending](#) and [Health and Economic Mobility/Healthy Neighborhoods](#) convenings; HIMSS SDOH Task Force; All In/Data Across Sectors for Health [Annual Conference](#); RISE Social Determinants of Health [Annual Conference](#), and others.
- **Biweekly Newsletter + Twitter**
 - Aligning for Health has continued to expand and improve its biweekly newsletter in 2021 – providing updates on member social determinants leadership, news on social needs and health equity, updates on SDOH- and health disparities-related legislation and Administration activity, and information on recent social determinants reports, initiatives, opportunities and events. The number of subscribers has increased by over 25 percent from January through November 2021.
 - Aligning for Health has also continued to grow its presence on Twitter, increasing its following by about 35 percent through November 2021 and enhancing engagement over the last year. The platform is used to highlight members, share news articles, announcements, legislation, and other information related to social determinants.
- **SDOH, Health Equity and Maternal Health Legislative Tracker**
 - Aligning for Health maintains a legislative tracker of legislation introduced throughout the 117th Congress related to social determinants of health, health disparities and health equity, and maternal and infant health. This is a public resource, and we update this tracker both on our [website](#) and through a more comprehensive PDF document bi-weekly.