



Close the Health Gap

The Issue

Millions of Americans have inadequate access to health care. Health disparities and inequities that exist in the United States are strongly correlated to the economic, social, and environmental factors (social determinants) that surround individuals, communities and populations and are often based on decades of discrimination and social isolation. The current medical model that focuses on individual behavioral care does not take into account how the social, economic, and geographic environments can affect the health problems of a population as well as their treatment.

Societal Goal

We propose to develop a socially-oriented model of healthcare that breaks down and removes the root causes of health inequity and promotes upstream interventions and primary care prevention that will eradicate the gap that exists for marginalized populations.

A Decade of Work

Over the next ten years, researchers, practitioners and policymakers can engage in a variety of activities that will advance this Grand Challenge and ignite social work achievements, including efforts to:

- Focus on settings-based research and policy initiatives and interventions to improve the conditions of daily life that facilitate change on the intermediate, community level.
- Advance community empowerment and advocacy for sustainable health solutions and prevention through representation in governance of the health-care delivery system and interventions that create sustainable community changes.
- Cultivate health innovation in primary care and community-based centers to help those with lifelong suffering or intergenerational disadvantage.
- Promote access to healthcare and insurance for all through opportunities with ACA as well as educating communities on the benefits of Medicaid expansion.
- Foster development of an interpersonal health workforce that encompasses transdisciplinary social interventions and collaborative behavioral and physical healthcare.
- Develop a global health policy agenda on reducing alcohol misuse to reduce one of the leading causes of preventable death and disease.

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Resources

- Begun, A. L., Clapp, J. D., & The Alcohol Misuse Grand Challenge Collective. (2015). Preventing and reducing alcohol misuse and its consequences: A grand challenge for social work (Grand Challenges for Social Work Initiative Working Paper No. 14). Cleveland, OH: American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare.
- Browne, T., Gehlert, S., Andrews, C. M., Zebrack, B. J., Walther, V. N., Steketee, G., ... Merighi, J. R. (2017). Strengthening health care systems: Better health across America (Grand Challenges for Social Work initiative Working Paper No. 22). Cleveland, OH: American Academy of Social Work & Social Welfare.
- Spencer, M. S., Walters, K. L., & Clapp, J. D. (2016, September). [*Policy recommendations for meeting the Grand Challenge to Close the Health Gap*](#) (Grand Challenges for Social Work Initiative Policy Brief No. 2). Cleveland, OH: American Academy of Social Work & Social Welfare.
- Walters, K. L., Spencer, M. S., Smukler, M., Allen, H. L., Andrews, C., Browne, T., ... Uehara, E. (2016). Health equity: Eradicating health inequalities for future generations (Grand Challenges for Social Work Initiative Working Paper No. 19). Cleveland, OH: American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare.
- Websites:
 - <http://www.GrandChallengesforSocialWork.org/12-challenges/close-the-health-gap/>
 - <https://closethehealthgap.com>

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