

# Close the Health Gap

*A Grand Challenge for Social Work*

Millions of Americans do not have adequate access to health care. The Grand Challenge to **Close the Health Gap** is working to redress the fundamental failure of our current, individualist model and its inability to address historical inequities in access to health care around race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability status, geography, sexual and gender identity, and socioeconomic status. Instead, this Grand Challenge calls for a new approach that emphasizes the centrality of the social determinants of health towards resolving these injustices.

During the past five years, network members and others have worked to **Close the Health Gap** through their research, advocacy, and teaching. They have organized three working groups and published and presented widely. They have articulated policy recommendations for state and federal legislators. And, they have expanded the network of Indigenous health researchers through new training programs.

## INTEGRATING SOCIAL CARE INTO THE DELIVERY OF HEALTH CARE: MOVING UPSTREAM TO IMPROVE THE NATION'S HEALTH

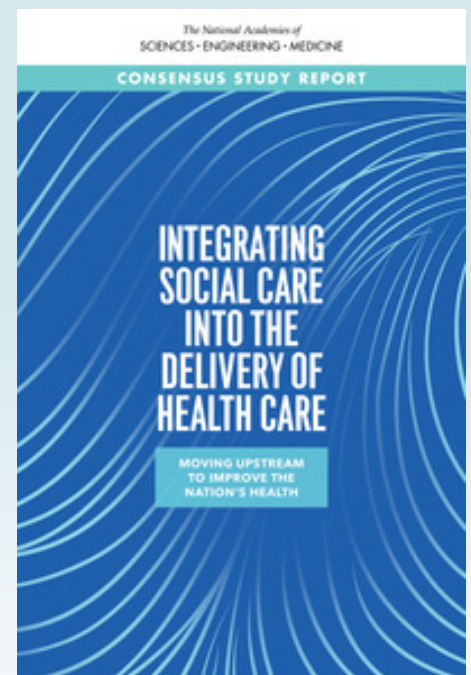
*Several individuals and universities involved with the Grand Challenges participated in the development of the 2019 consensus study from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, "[Integrating Social Care into the Delivery of Health Care: Moving Upstream to Improve the Nation's Health](#)."*

*The report contains five overarching goals and associated recommendations that health care systems, government agencies, and others should implement to better integrate patients' social needs into health care delivery and to improve health equity — especially critical in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.*

*The report recommends the following steps:*

- *Better integrate social care into health care delivery.*
- *Support and train an engaged, integrated care workforce.*
- *Develop an infrastructure for data sharing between health and social care.*
- *Finance the integration of health care and social care.*

Learn more at [nationalacademies.org/SocialCare](https://nationalacademies.org/SocialCare)



# Celebrating 5 Years of Progress on the Grand Challenges!

## Network Leadership

### NETWORK CO-LEADS

**Michael Spencer, PhD**  
Presidential Term Professor  
University of Washington  
[mspenc@uw.edu](mailto:mspenc@uw.edu)

**Karina Walters, PhD**  
Professor  
University of Washington  
[kw5@uw.edu](mailto:kw5@uw.edu)

### WORKING GROUPS

*Population Health through Community  
and Settings-Based Research and Practice*

*Strengthening Health Care Systems:  
Better Health Across America*

*Reducing and Preventing Alcohol Misuse  
and Its Consequences*

## LOOKING BACK

During the past five years, members of the **Close the Health Gap** Grand Challenge network and their colleagues have engaged in a variety of activities. They have:

- **Promoted** Indigenous and culturally grounded, place-based research in health and well-being through publications and presentations
- **Expanded** the network of Indigenous health researchers through innovative academic preparatory programs
- **Delivered** numerous presentations at the Society for Social Work & Research and other conferences, as well as a [webinar](#) for the National Association of Social Workers
- **Participated** in a consensus study on [“Integrating Social Care into the Delivery of Health Care: Moving Upstream to Improve the Nation’s Health”](#) by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine
- **Published** three concept papers on [combatting alcohol misuse](#), [promoting health equity](#), and [strengthening health care systems](#)
- **Contributed** to special issues of the [Journal of Social Work Practice in the Addictions](#), the [Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work](#), and [Human Biology](#) as well as an issue of the [International Journal of Alcohol and Drug Research](#)
- **Wrote** an [editorial](#) on “The Case for a National Health Social Work Practice-Based Research Network in Addressing Health Equity” in *Health & Social Work*
- **Testified** before the [House Committee on Education and the Workforce](#) about expanding access to substance abuse disorder treatment
- **Briefed** federal legislators on “When a Good Life Depends on Federal Policy,” “Addressing the Crisis in Older Adult Mental Health,” and “Is Treating Depression the Answer to Solving the Opioid Crisis?”
- **Advocated** for the inclusion of social workers in responding to the opioid crisis

## LOOKING AHEAD

During the next five years, members of the Grand Challenge to **Close the Health Gap** network and their colleagues plan to:

- **Collaborate** with other Grand Challenges, particularly **Create Social Responses to a Changing Environment**, **Reduce Extreme Economic Inequality**, and **Eliminate Racism**, to address issues that impact health and health equity
- **Continue to advocate** for their [policy recommendations](#):
  1. **Focus** on settings-based research and interventions to improve the conditions of daily life
  2. **Advance** community empowerment and advocacy for sustainable health solutions and prevention
  3. **Cultivate** health innovation in primary care and community-based centers
  4. **Promote** access to health care and insurance for all
  5. **Foster** development of an interprofessional health workforce
  6. **Develop** a global health policy agenda on reducing alcohol misuse
- **Continue to challenge** structural racism, settler colonialism, white supremacy, and racial capitalism and their adverse impact on our biosocial complex
- **Identify** leadership for the working group on *Strengthening Health Care Systems* and grow the working group on *Population Health* more strategically

## Join Us

[www.closeithehealthgap.com](http://www.closeithehealthgap.com)

[grandchallengesforsocialwork.org](http://grandchallengesforsocialwork.org)

[GCSocialWork@ssw.umaryland.edu](mailto:GCSocialWork@ssw.umaryland.edu)

[Join Our Mailing List](#)

[grandchallengesforsocialwork](https://www.linkedin.com/company/grandchallengesforsocialwork)

[@GCSocialWork](https://twitter.com/GCSocialWork) | [#Up4theChallenge](https://twitter.com/Up4theChallenge)

[GCSocialWork](#)

[Grand Challenges for Social Work](#)

[Give](#)