How does a large health system learn about and improve social health integration?

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SONNET
Social Needs Network for Evaluation and Translation

Background

Kaiser Permanente aims to improve the reach, relevance, and effectiveness of their approaches to understanding and addressing members' social needs by leveraging rigorous implementation and evaluation support.

Objective

Build an innovative and evidence-based way to test and improve social care implementation and evaluation across Kaiser Permanente.

Methods

Kaiser Permanente's Social Needs Network for Evaluation and Translation (SONNET) was founded in 2017 as **a learning health system (LHS) focused on social care across all 8 regional markets and the Kaiser Permanente Bernard J. Tyson School of Medicine**. Its core model centers on a national network of applied researchers with expertise in research, evaluation, and implementation who partner with operational leaders to innovate in how they identify and address health-related social needs.

Results

SONNET supports Kaiser Permanente operations by leveraging scientific capabilities and cross-regional partnerships to learn what works to improve members' social and overall health outcomes. As a social care LHS, SONNET engages in 4 core functions:

1. **Research and evaluation:** design and lead research studies and evaluations in partnership with operational leaders that inform key decisions and help achieve strategic priorities.
2. **Just-in-time review and analysis:** answer pressing operational social care questions using advanced analytics and rapid evidence reviews.
3. **External grant development:** apply for grant funding that provides external resources in support of mutual operational and research goals.
4. **Leadership in the field:** share learnings of social health integration successes and challenges.

Example projects include a representative survey of KP members' social risk and needs, studies of the impact of social health on health care cost and utilization, and a co-developed CME training for providers introducing them to social risk-informed care.

SONNET core capabilities and outcomes in 2024

Research & evaluation

Design and lead studies and evaluations that **inform key decisions** and help SHP achieve its strategic priorities

- **10** Research projects
- **11** Learning community presentations
- **>70** SONNET presentations, summaries, and papers curated and added to the SHP Learning Library

Just-in-time analysis & consultation

Help **answer SHP's pressing questions** using advanced analytics and rapid evidence reviews

- **15** Ad hoc consultations and requests
- **12** Internal and external groups in which SONNET participated

External grant development

Bring together teams to apply for grant funding that **provides external resources** in support of SHP's goals

- **2** Grants funded
  - **$4M** From PCORI
  - **$2M** From AHRQ
- **8** Other grants submitted and under review

Leadership in the field

Share what we learn to help **advance KP's reputation** as a leader in social health

- **7** Presentations at scientific conferences
- **6** Peer-reviewed papers published or accepted
- **3** Newsletters
  - **35%** Open rate within KP
  - **38%** Open rate externally

Select examples of how SONNET supported social health integration at Kaiser Permanente in 2024

- Provided insights on the link between social risk and high-cost emergency utilization using 2022 National Social Health Survey data
- Shed light on opportunities to improve the Community Resource Directory for members
- Discovered a link between social needs resource navigation and primary care utilization the Social Health Integration Pilot at Kaiser Permanente Washington
- Brought in external grant funding to support new learning around the Community Support Hub
- Provided data, analyses, and consultation to inform decision-making for nutrition insecurity initiatives, Community Support Hub call center improvements, Medicare improvements, and grant development

Conclusion

SONNET and its LHS-approach to social care offers a model for other health care systems interested in pursuing embedded social care research and evaluation. **Partnered research-operational approaches provide an innovative model** for understanding and disseminating the latest scientific evidence and identifying and implementing social care interventions **likely to have the greatest impact on health and health equity.**

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