

TEAMING UP WITH PUBLIC HEALTH:

Extending the Family Physician's Impact From Clinic to Community

Family medicine and public health have a shared goal of improving the health of families and communities. Your impact as a family physician can extend well beyond the clinic walls with the support of public health organizations and community-based resources. This primer can help you build on the public health work you may already be doing and identify new opportunities for teaming up with public health.



THE DRIVERS OF HEALTH

40% Social and Economic Environment

30% Health Behavior

20% Clinical Care

10% Physical Environment

Information from Hood CM, Gennuso KP, Swain GR, et al. County health rankings: relationships between determinant factors and health outcomes. *Am J Prev Med.* 2016;50(2):129-135.

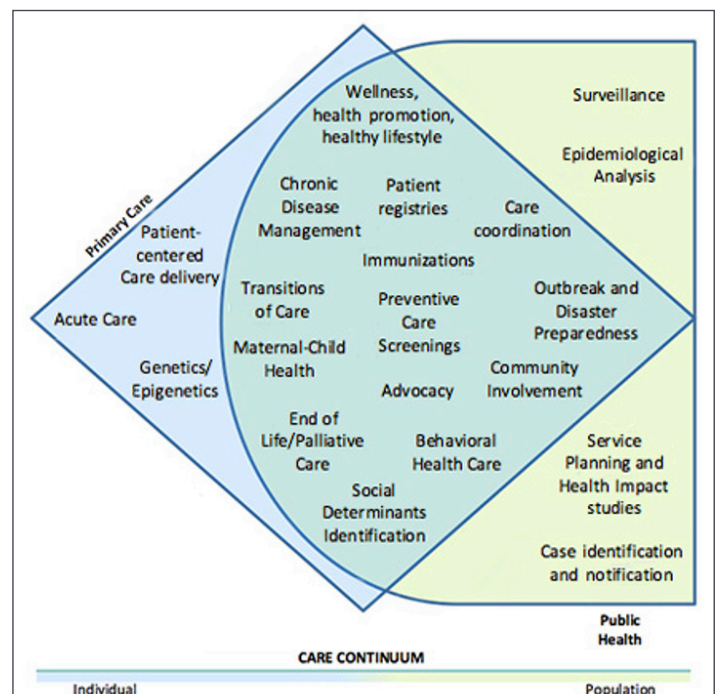
“[Clinicians] often voice concern about how difficult it is to do what they entered the profession to do—to advance the health of people in their communities and positively impact their lives. Although their medical bags are full of extraordinary tools and techniques, [clinicians] are able to do only so much in this world of growing medical complexities and chronic illnesses, particularly when these conditions are related to a patient's socioeconomic and environmental circumstances.”

— THE PRACTICAL PLAYBOOK: PUBLIC HEALTH AND PRIMARY CARE TOGETHER

Family physicians are powerful allies for public health organizations because they are at the front line of emerging disease trends and are a significant source of individual-level data. They also serve as influential advocates for policy, systems, and environmental changes in their communities. Family physicians can create positive, sustainable change in their patients' health by identifying individual needs in the clinical setting and collaborating with public health organizations to improve the places where patients live, learn, work, and play.

[Innovative clinic-community partnerships](#) are developing across the nation in an effort to generate significant, lasting improvement in the health of all families and communities. *Figure 1* shows the relationship between public health and primary care and highlights the many areas of overlap and complementary work. Use this image to guide your engagement with public health organizations in your community.

Figure 1. Primary Care and Public Health Care Continuum



Reprinted with permission from American Academy of Family Physicians. Integration of primary care and public health. December 2020. Accessed April 3, 2023. <https://www.aafp.org/about/policies/all/integration-primary-care.html>

How Do Family Physicians Partner With Public Health?

You may be partnering with public health in a variety of ways, including the following:

- Clinical Level
 - Screening your patients for health-related social needs with a [screening tool](#) developed by The EveryONE Project™ and having a plan in place to refer patients to community-based resources.
 - Participating in your state's [immunizations registry](#) and [prescription drug monitoring program](#) (PDMP).
 - Reporting infectious diseases to your state's [point of contact](#).
 - Communicating with your local public health department about COVID-19 and flu cases.
- Community Level
 - Sharing information on trends in health-related social needs with public health and community stakeholders.
 - Encouraging nonprofit hospitals to direct their community benefit efforts to meet community-specific needs.
 - Fostering discussions about biases and how structural racism contributes to inequity in your community.
 - Providing testimony and evidence to educate stakeholders from local government, private industries, and other entities about how social factors impact health.
- Systems Level
 - Promoting data accessibility between electronic health records (EHRs), public health information systems, and social service organizations.
 - Advocating for policy, systems, and environmental changes that will strengthen healthy families and communities.
 - Working with local, state, and national governments to adopt a [Health in All Policies](#) approach to ensure that governmental infrastructure and policies integrate considerations of health, well-being, and equity (e.g., Complete Streets and Housing First programs).

Where Can Family Physicians Start?

For American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) members who want to extend their impact into the community, the following steps are a good starting point:

- Identify community-based resources with [Neighborhood Navigator](#).
- Use resources from [The EveryONE Project Toolkit](#) to screen your patients for social determinants of health and develop an action plan to address them.
- Learn more about advocacy opportunities available through the [national AAFP](#) and your [local chapter](#).
- Understand your public health reporting requirements (e.g., [immunizations registry](#), [infectious disease reporting](#), and [PDMP participation](#)).
- Explore [county health rankings](#) to get a snapshot of the health of your community and state.

References

1. Michener JL, Koo D, Castrucci BC, et al., eds. *The Practical Playbook: Public Health and Primary Care Together*. Oxford University Press; 2015.