

# Making a Difference Starts Now: How Nursing Students and Nurses Can Promote Social Determinants of Health and Healthy People 2030

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In nursing school, we spend countless hours learning how to care for patients, how to assess, plan, and intervene. But one of the most eye-opening lessons we learn is that health starts long before someone arrives at a clinic or hospital. It begins in everyday life, in the food people eat, the neighborhoods they live in, the schools they attend, and whether they feel safe and supported.

These are known as the Social Determinants of Health (SDOH), the conditions that shape a person's life and directly influence their physical and mental health (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion [ODPHP], 2020). SDOH are central to Healthy People 2030, a national initiative that sets science-based goals to improve health and reduce disparities over the next decade.

As nursing students, it's easy to feel like the challenges around SDOH, like poverty, food insecurity, and lack of access to care, are too large for us to impact. But small actions make a difference. In clinical rotations, we can start by asking patients whether they face barriers like transportation or housing. Taking time to understand the barriers they face helps us care for the whole person, not just their diagnosis. We can even take our impact beyond the bedside by creating tangible tools that support patients and staff. For example, developing resource guides for our clinical sites that list nearby food pantries, shelters, low-cost clinics, or mental health services can be incredibly helpful for patients who might not know where to turn. These

guides can also empower preceptors and fellow students to have more informed, compassionate conversations about social needs. Also, volunteering with local health departments or nonprofit clinics gives us a closer look at how public health efforts are carried out in real time, from vaccine drives to mobile screenings. Helping organize community wellness events such as health fairs, blood pressure clinics, or nutrition workshops also allows us to practice education and outreach while building trust within underserved populations.

Practicing nurses play a critical role in addressing social determinants of health, not just in theory, but in everyday care. Simple steps like asking patients if they have enough food at home or safe transportation to their appointments can open the door to meaningful conversations. Tools like the AHC-HRSN screening questionnaire make it easier to identify unmet social needs during routine assessments. From there, nurses can collaborate with case managers and social workers to connect patients with local food banks, housing programs, or transportation services. Even suggesting that SDOH questions be included in electronic health records is a step toward making these concerns part of standard care.

## Social Determinants of Health



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Healthy People 2030

Outside the clinical setting, we can drive change on a broader level. Joining a hospital's community health committee, helping lead quality improvement projects that focus on equity, or volunteering with local outreach programs are all ways to influence the systems we work in. Advocacy is another powerful tool, anyone can write to legislators about expanding Medicaid access, speak up at town halls, or get involved with the American Nurses Association (ANA), the National Student Nurses Association (NSNA), and other professional organizations to amplify their voice. Whether it's inside a hospital or out in the community, nurses have the credibility, experience, and compassion to lead real change.

Whether you're a student or a seasoned nurse, promoting health equity starts with awareness and action. SDOH aren't just

checkboxes, they're the reality many of our patients live with every day. When we address those realities, we do more than provide care, we create change. ■

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# 2025 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures Report

Each September, people from all over the world unite to raise awareness and to advocate for support and research efforts. As we approach World Alzheimer's Day, which takes place every September 21, we have more reasons than ever to continue the fight to end this disease. We now have traditionally approved treatments to slow Alzheimer's in the early stages, but there is much more work to do. Nurses are uniquely positioned to spread Alzheimer's awareness and challenge the stigma surrounding dementia to foster greater understanding and empathy. That work begins by sharing the facts.

As the number of Americans living with Alzheimer's disease tops more than 7 million for the first time, nearly 4 in 5 Americans would want to know if they had Alzheimer's disease before it impacted their lives. They also want treatment, even if it comes with risks, as long as it slows the progression of the disease. These are among the insights uncovered in the 2025 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures Report released by the Alzheimer's Association.

This annual report reveals the burden of Alzheimer's and dementia on individuals, caregivers, government and the nation's health care system. The report shows that the prevalence and cost of Alzheimer's disease are rising.

Among the findings:

- For the first time, there are now more than 7 million Americans living with Alzheimer's — an estimated 7.2 million. In New York State, 12.7% of adults over 65 are living with Alzheimer's.
- The national cost of caring for these individuals is projected to reach \$384 billion in 2025 — \$24 billion higher than a year ago.
- Across the country, there are nearly 12 million families and other caregivers of people living with dementia, providing an estimated 19.2 billion hours of unpaid help. The number of New York State residents serving as unpaid family caregivers increased from last year to 656,000.

"This year's report finds that the impact of Alzheimer's on New York State residents and families is significant," said Erica Salamida, Director of Community Outreach for the New York State Coalition of Alzheimer's Association Chapters. "Now more than ever, we need to work to advance disease research and treatments that can slow the current trajectory and help all New York families affected by Alzheimer's and other dementia."

An accompanying special report highlights findings from a nationwide survey of more than 1,700 U.S. adults aged 45 and

older, examining their awareness and attitudes about early detection and diagnosis of Alzheimer's, tests used to help diagnose Alzheimer's and treatments that can slow progression of the disease. It finds:

## Americans want to know early if they have Alzheimer's disease and want access to testing.

- Nearly 4 in 5 Americans (79%) would want to know if they had Alzheimer's disease before having symptoms or before symptoms interfere with daily activities.
- More than 9 in 10 Americans said they would want to take a simple test — such as a blood biomarker test — if it were available.

## If diagnosed with Alzheimer's, most Americans would want medication to slow its progression and would highly value information about the disease and treatment.

- More than 9 in 10 Americans (92%) would probably or definitely want to take a medication that could slow the progression of Alzheimer's disease following an Alzheimer's diagnosis.
- Nearly three in five Americans (58%) said they would accept a moderate or high level of risk with taking an anti-amyloid medication to slow the progression of