



# Addressing Social Determinants of Health for Employers:

## Awareness, Accountability, and Action

The scope of worksite wellness initiatives today extends beyond individuals' physical health to include dimensions of mental and emotional health, job satisfaction, social connectedness and financial well-being. Social determinants of health (SDOH), social risk factors and employees' individual social needs can impact employer business performance and profitability. Through internal collaboration and external partnerships that address social risk factors and employees' needs, employers can develop a healthy, high-performing workforce. The following information serves as a starting point in assessing the extent to which your organization is prepared to address such issues.

### **Awareness** Social risk factors directly impact your employees' health.

- **Location** of where employees work and live can reduce life expectancy.
- **Financial instability** influences physical health.
- **Food insecurity** is not limited to the underemployed. It can also affect full-time employees.
- **Social isolation** negatively impacts productivity.

### **Accountability** Your business directly impacts employees' social risk factors and social needs.

- The work environment can cause psychosocial stress or foster psychological safety.
- Employees' education level can increase or limit employment opportunities.
- Gender and racial inclusion in the workplace can improve interpersonal work relations.
- Employers can serve as influential cross-sector partners while fostering fulfilling employee experiences.

## Action Employers can take action to positively impact employees in the workplace.

Focus Area	Actions	Considerations & Questions
<b>Organizational Philosophy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socialize SDOH internally by naming and describing their significance.</li> <li>• Educate business partners on financial management and health literacy.</li> <li>• Train managers in appreciative inquiry and to recognize the impacts SDOH have on employee productivity and performance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the significance of workforce human capital illustrated in our mission and/or vision statements?</li> <li>• How are our mission and/or vision statements operationalized in daily practice?</li> <li>• Are our employees paid a fair, living wage?</li> <li>• Does our manager training at all levels include content about SDOH and referral resources?</li> </ul>
<b>Work Cultural Environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create policies and enforce practices that explicitly and implicitly value health.</li> <li>• Model and actively support policy enforcement throughout all levels of leadership.</li> <li>• Develop leave policies that include caregiving.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What workplace factors interfere with employees' ability to do their jobs well while maintaining their well-being?</li> <li>• How do new policies reinforce workforce health and well-being?</li> <li>• Do all employees have an opportunity for career advancement?</li> </ul>
<b>Health and Well-Being Benefits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen to employees share their social needs.</li> <li>• Support employees in utilizing benefits and vendor partner resources.</li> <li>• Destigmatize the use of resources and benefits.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What key resources, both in the community and within our workplace, address employee social needs?</li> <li>• Are we utilizing employee surveys to determine what benefit resources are requested by employees?</li> <li>• Do we offer point solutions and contract with vendor partners who provide effective financial and mental well-being resources?</li> </ul>
<b>Work Scheduling and Pay</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess recruiting, hiring, scheduling, and payment practices for outdated or default norms that hinder employee well-being.</li> <li>• Consider pilots that promote employee flexibility and job autonomy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do our employees need in terms of equitable work scheduling and pay?</li> <li>• Is employee sleep disruption considered in travel planning for high-frequency travelers?</li> <li>• Are there programs to support diversity and inclusion in hiring and promotion practices?</li> </ul>
<b>Work-Life Integration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outline availability and communication expectations during "off" time.</li> <li>• Work to create a culture where people are informed and feel safe to speak about physical, behavioral, and social challenges.</li> <li>• Develop a mental health anti-stigma campaign.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do people leaders model the prioritization of work-life balance?</li> <li>• Do we offer confidential access to human resources, employee assistance counselors and/or social workers?</li> <li>• Are employees able to disconnect from all business communications, without penalty, during their 'off' time?</li> </ul>
<b>Work Physical Environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build a work environment that makes the healthy choice the easy choice.</li> <li>• Create easy access to natural light, affordable and nutritious food, smoke-free environments, filtered water, walking paths, and quiet spaces.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are the dimensions of well-being encouraged (or discouraged) in our organization?</li> <li>• How are physical activity or periods of rest encouraged?</li> <li>• What are the barriers or challenges that make it difficult for employees to practice healthy behaviors?</li> </ul>

This guide is a product of HERO staff and members of the HERO Healthy Workplaces, Healthy Communities Committee (HWHC). The full paper published by the HWHC SDOH Workgroup, Social Determinants of Health — An Employer Priority, is [available here](#). Additional resources for building public-private partnerships and case study examples addressing SDOH can be found at [Get-HWHC.org](#)

The Health Enhancement Research Organization (HERO) is a national non-profit dedicated to identifying and sharing best practices in the field of workplace health and well-being (HWB). HERO was established more than twenty years ago to create and disseminate research, policy, leadership and strategy to advance workplace HWB, providing leadership of the nation's workforce. Much of the good work that HERO does is achieved through the efforts of its volunteer committees.