



NIH-Wide Social Determinants of Health Research Coordinating Committee (SDOH RCC) Charter

Background

Social determinants of health (SDOH) have emerged as an increasingly high-priority research area for NIH, other Federal agencies, and organizations across many sectors. The [2021-2025 NIH-Wide Strategic Plan](#) calls for foundational science on how social exposures and experiences alone, and in combination with biological and behavioral factors, impact human health. NIH added SDOH as a new category in its [Research, Condition, and Disease Classification \(RCDC\) system](#) in 2020 to track investments in SDOH research and training. More broadly, as just three examples, HHS convened a SDOH workgroup in early 2021 to develop an agency-wide SDOH action plan, Congressional Members launched a SDOH Caucus in July 2021, and the White House convened the SDOH Interagency Policy Committee in February 2022 to develop an action plan to inform and advance policies to address SDOH.

A coordinated SDOH scientific agenda at the NIH is needed to accelerate domestic and global research to better understand the multiple and interacting social, psychological, behavioral, and biologic mechanisms through which SDOH affect health outcomes; to advance SDOH research methodologies; and to identify effective interventions at multiple levels across diseases and conditions over the life course. A coordinated SDOH scientific agenda is also central to optimizing efforts to reduce health disparities and advance health equity. Given the wide-reaching effects of SDOH, such research spans most NIH Institutes, Centers, and Offices (ICOs). Several NIH working groups are currently advancing IC- or topic-specific SDOH scientific opportunities. However, propelling discoveries in this NIH-wide scientific field requires breaking down unintentional siloes, effectively leveraging SDOH investments and innovations across ICOs, and enhancing collaboration and coordination to minimize duplication and improve efficiencies of efforts.

Goal and Objectives

The overall goal of the Research Coordinating Committee (RCC) is to accelerate NIH-wide SDOH research across diseases and conditions, populations, stages of the life course, and SDOH domains, domestically and globally.

Specific objectives to achieve this goal include the following:

- 1) Facilitate sharing of SDOH research information across the NIH and other federal partners;
- 2) Identify SDOH research gaps and promising research directions;
- 3) Develop SDOH expertise, capacity, and a learning system at NIH; and
- 4) Build community and collaboration in SDOH research across NIH and with federal partners.

Activities associated with these objectives will be fueled by scientific exchanges among RCC leadership and membership with multidisciplinary and specialized expertise across SDOH domains and related health outcomes.

Possible Activities

The NIH-wide SDOH RCC will identify, prioritize, coordinate, and collaborate on various activities to complement existing SDOH research activities and advance new activities with the overall goal of accelerating SDOH research. These activities might include the following:

- 1) Create a website portal/index of NIH and external activities and resources (e.g., FOAs, publications, curricula, workshops, conceptual definitions/frameworks) to increase awareness of and access to information and opportunities.
- 2) Conduct a portfolio analysis of NIH-funded SDOH research and literature review to identify the state of the science (with emphasis on achievements, gaps, and emerging areas).
- 3) Conduct an environmental scan of existing NIH and Federal agency SDOH-related groups and activities to understand and complement existing efforts.
- 4) Encourage ICO collaboration on extramural research activities via RFAs and other NOFOs.
- 5) Synergize and collaborate with existing NIH SDOH research efforts to develop joint activities (e.g., workshops, seminars, publications, trainings).
- 6) Develop and encourage a common conceptualization for SDOH that could be used across NIH, while considering those used by HHS and other organizations. This can include developing a SDOH glossary and NOFO language.
- 7) Foster development, validation, and use of SDOH measurements and methodologies. This includes supporting and encouraging the development of common data elements and measures of SDOH to increase standardization (<https://www.phenxtoolkit.org/>). Based on portfolio analysis, develop research resources for the field.
- 8) Provide data science, data sharing, and open science guidance, tools, resources, or incentives to improve standardization, data sharing, and aggregation.
- 9) Build SDOH capacity, expertise, community, and collaborations across NIH in SDOH research, including in the NIH intramural program.
- 10) Foster communication with other Federal agencies and organizations to expand reach and capacity of SDOH efforts.

Organizational Structure, Membership, and Responsibilities

RCC Executive Committee:

NIH ICO leadership (i.e., ICO Director, Deputy Director, Senior Advisor, Division Director) from the involved ICOs (FIC, NCATS, NCCIH, NCI, NHGRI, NIA, NIAMS, NICHD, NIDA, NIDCR, NIDDK, NIEHS, NIMHD, NINR, NLM, OAR, OBSSR, ODP, ORWH, SGMRO) will comprise the NIH-wide SDOH RCC Executive

Committee that oversees RCC governance, priorities, and activities. At least two of these members will serve as **Executive Committee Co-Chairs** to provide overall leadership and serve as the main points of contact for RCC Coordinators and Members.

RCC Coordinators:

The Executive Committee Co-Chairs will appoint at least two RCC Coordinators. The RCC Coordinators will have subject matter expertise and be champions of SDOH in their ICOs and beyond. The RCC Coordinators will provide leadership and facilitate communication between the Executive Committee and RCC members, coordination, and management of RCC meetings and activities. The RCC Coordinators will also provide briefing updates monthly for the Executive Committee, and participate in Executive Committee meetings.

RCC Members:

The Director of each participating ICO (not just those serving on the Executive Committee) will designate a lead and alternate representative to attend monthly meetings, coordinate their ICO's participation on the committee, and ensure bi-directional communication between their ICO and the RCC. In addition to the lead and alternate members, other interested ICO Federal staff are welcome to serve as active members of the RCC.

RCC Working Groups:

The RCC will form working groups to focus on specific topics or to complete time-limited activities on an as-needed basis.

Executive Secretary and Administrative Support:

Executive Committee Co-Chairs will identify a NIH staff member or contractor to serve as Executive Secretary for the Executive Committee, and provide administrative support for the RCC including assistance with meeting planning, notes, and communication.

Meetings

The Executive Committee will meet 6 times per year, and can modify meeting frequency as needed. Agendas for Executive Committee meetings will be determined by the Executive Committee Co-Chairs, with input from the RCC Coordinators, the Executive Secretary, and Members.

The RCC will meet monthly, with the RCC Coordinators setting the agenda with input from Members, Executive Committee Co-Chairs, and the Executive Secretary. In lieu of some monthly meetings, the RCC might organize seminars, workshops, or ad hoc meetings for specific emerging topics to discuss research opportunities, program updates, scientific advances, and proposed activities.

RCC Working Group members and chairs will determine an appropriate meeting schedule to achieve the charges of each Working Group.

RCC-Designated Activities

At the end of each calendar year, RCC members and Coordinators will be invited to inform and contribute to the Executive Committee (EC)'s identification of strategic priorities for the following calendar year. Additionally, strategic priorities may be informed by the state of the science, subject matter experts, and SDOH portfolio and landscape analyses. Priorities will focus on advancing the overall goal of the RCC (accelerate research on SDOH across NIH) and must directly link to one or more core objectives: 1) facilitating SDOH information sharing, 2) identifying promising SDOH research directions, 3) developing SDOH expertise and capacity, and 4) cultivating SDOH research collaborations.

The selection of strategic priorities will be identified and disseminated to the RCC at the beginning of each year. This will initiate the solicitation of activities from RCC members to achieve the outlined priorities for the year. This call is inclusive of a broad set of activities – such as those focused on internal NIH staff, HHS and other federal agencies, the extramural community, or the general public – to advance the goal of the RCC and its identified priorities for the year. An activity can be also proposed outside of the formal annual process to meet emerging or high-priority RCC needs. Please see the RCC-Designated Activity Protocol for additional detail.