



NIH Social Determinants of Health Executive Committee (SDOH EC)

Background

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) recognizes the need for a coordinated scientific agenda to better understand and evaluate approaches to address social determinants of health (SDOH) and the multiple and interacting social, psychological, behavioral, and biologic mechanisms through which SDOH affect health and health outcomes across diseases and conditions over the life course. Addressing the adverse effects of SDOH is also a key strategy for reducing health disparities and advancing health equity. The [2021-2025 NIH-Wide Strategic Plan](#) calls for foundational research that provides a greater understanding of SDOH, and more specifically, the impact of social experiences and environmental exposures on health. This NIH focus aligns with broader interest in SDOH that has risen to the forefront of health-related priorities through the development of an HHS-wide SDOH Action Plan in 2021-2022, the launch of the SDOH Congressional Caucus in 2021, and the White House-convened SDOH Interagency Policy Committee in 2022.

The NIH-wide SDOH Research Coordinating Committee (SDOH RCC) was approved in February 2022 and represents the culmination of work that began with grassroots efforts among staff at various Institutes, Centers, and Offices (ICOs) to establish a group of individuals united in their interest to advance SDOH research. Although several formal and informal NIH working groups had been coordinating and collaborating to advance IC- or topic-specific SDOH scientific opportunities and resources, the NIH-wide SDOH RCC represents the first endeavor to coordinate and accelerate these efforts across the NIH. The NIH ICD Steering Committee also approved the launch of an NIH-wide SDOH RCC, comprised of leadership from member ICOs to oversee RCC governance, priorities, and activities.

Purpose

The overall goal of the NIH-wide SDOH RCC is to accelerate SDOH research across diseases and conditions, populations, stages of the life course, and SDOH domains, domestically and globally. The purpose of the SDOH EC is to advance a coordinated SDOH research agenda across the NIH by advising, directing, and supporting the activities of the RCC.

The NIH SDOH EC will provide oversight, guidance, and approval of RCC activities to include (but not limited to) the following two areas of focus:

Research:

- Through engagement of the RCC and the RCC Coordinators, review the NIH-wide SDOH landscape and portfolio analysis on a periodic basis (every 1-4 years) to identify gaps and opportunities, as relevant to the NIH mission (including those identified in the 2021-2025 NIH Strategic Plan).
- Lead, through the RCC, the development of a SDOH Strategic Framework for NIH Research to guide RCC-designated activities. This might include articulating how NIH SDOH research intersects with existing frameworks, models, and definitions.
- Identify important and impactful SDOH research, resource, measurement, or training/capacity-building opportunities with cross-NIH interest that may be amplified or accelerated. The primary goal of the EC and RCC will be efforts to bolster SDOH research across the NIH (e.g., to foster and develop activities that have relevance across diseases and conditions, populations, life course, and SDOH domains). This might include a focus on NIH processes and procedures needed to support SDOH research and/or defining research methods, standards, and ontologies that can benefit the research community.
- Identify opportunities for enhanced ICO collaboration and/or joint activities that may include seminars, workshops, trainings, or publications.
- Review and approve concepts for RCC-designated activities proposed by the RCC that the EC deems relevant for addressing the highest-priority NIH-wide needs in SDOH research. Language in this Charter does not preclude ICOs from individually conceptualizing and developing SDOH-related activities.
 - RCC-designated activities might include portfolio analyses, meetings, webinars, RFIs, etc. These activities might involve some financial expenditure by one or more ICs but are generally lower dollar activities (e.g., \$100K or less in total costs) and can move forward with EC awareness and input.
 - Activities (e.g., RFA) that require an advance commitment of significant funds from multiple ICs to be viable as an RCC-designated activity. Activities can move forward if sufficient resources are secured among interested ICOs.
 - On any SDOH-related activity where an ICO/s has already decided to take the lead and cover costs, the EC and RCC would be a useful venue for information sharing and gathering input.

Coordination and Communication:

- Work with the RCC to raise awareness and visibility of SDOH research and facilitate sharing of SDOH research findings, resources, and gaps across the NIH and among federal partner agencies and non-federal organizations.
- Strengthen and support communication with other federal agencies and non-federal organizations to expand the reach and capacity of SDOH activities within the NIH and avoid duplication of SDOH efforts already underway across HHS or other research agencies.
- Enhance health communication research and application as it relates to SDOH. It is recognized that addressing health communication needs related to SDOH includes research to better understand, prevent and mitigate misinformation and disinformation.

Structure, Membership, Governance

- The SDOH EC is comprised of ICO leadership from each of the participating ICOs, and may include ICO Directors, Deputy Directors, Senior Advisors, or Division Directors. Twenty ICOs are currently represented on the EC (FIC, NCATS, NCCIH, NCI, NHGRI, NIA, NIAMS, NICHD, NIDA, NIDCR, NIDDK, NIEHS, NIMHD, NINR, NLM, OAR, OBSSR, ODP, ORWH, SGMRO). Additional ICOs may join in the future based on shared interests.
 - As the SDOH RCC and EC become more established over time, RCC Coordinators may serve in 3-year service terms, to allow for rotating opportunities from ICOs approving participation.
- At least three members of the SDOH EC will serve as EC Co-Chairs to provide broader SDOH-related leadership and serve as the main points of contact between the EC, RCC Coordinators, and RCC members.
- In addition to membership in the SDOH EC, at least one ICO will provide a staff member to serve as an Executive Secretary to assist with coordination and logistics support for the SDOH EC as well as coordination between the EC and RCC Coordinators.
- The Executive Secretary (Exec Sec) will be a staff member and/or contractor identified by EC Co-Chairs and will play an important role during the formative coordination and development of the SDOH EC. After this formative period, EC members (in consultation with the RCC Coordinating Committee) will collectively determine whether to continue the arrangement or rotate the Exec Sec role and responsibilities to align with other EC members.
- A simple majority of EC members will constitute a quorum for meetings.

Function and Operations

- The SDOH EC will meet 6 times per year (2 of which are in conjunction with the RCC) but can modify the meeting schedule as needed.
- The agenda for EC meetings will be determined by the EC Co-Chairs, with input from the RCC Coordinators and the Executive Secretary.
- The EC Co-Chairs will appoint at least 2-5 RCC Coordinators, who will have subject matter expertise in SDOH. RCC Coordinators will serve as liaisons between the EC and RCC members.
- The EC will review NIH SDOH portfolio analyses, as needed and feasible to help identify research needs and opportunities, in consultation with the RCC Coordinators.
- The EC will receive and review quarterly reports from RCC Coordinators on activities of the RCC and RCC Working Groups.

RCC-Designated Activity Development and Selection

- The EC will oversee the development and execution of a NIH-wide SDOH Framework for NIH Research, which will articulate cross-cutting goals and objectives, priorities, and existing gaps in the NIH portfolio including research, training, or other capacity building and resources.
- The EC will focus on identifying cross-cutting SDOH-related research needs and opportunities for further development and support on an ongoing basis. New research should be based on a comprehensive environmental scan of existing efforts to minimize duplication of effort. These needs and opportunities will be directly informed by input from the RCC Coordinators and the full RCC. During the group's formative period, the RCC will focus on amplifying existing efforts,

communicating/ensuring staff engagement, and evaluating the SDOH research landscape to identify needs, gaps, and opportunities.

- RCC-Designated Activity Process
 - At the end of each calendar year, the EC will identify strategic priorities for the following calendar year.
 - At the beginning of each year, the EC will initiate an open call for RCC-designated activities to advance the overall goal of the RCC based on set priorities for the year.
 - Based on high-priority or emerging issues, the EC may also initiate calls for specific activities from RCC membership.
 - Strategic priorities will focus on advancing the overall goal of the RCC to accelerate SDOH research across NIH and must directly link to one or more RCC core objectives.
 - Proposed RCC-designated activities will be reviewed by the EC Co-Chairs and RCC Coordinators who will select some or all for presentation at an EC meeting. A summary of feedback will be provided for each presented activity no later than one month after the presentation.
 - Any initiative that is selected to move forward must be assessed for required resources and funding to support the development and implementation of the activity.
- RCC-designated activities that are selected will then move forward with subject matter expertise provided by RCC Coordinators and RCC members and logistical support provided by a contractor with support for EC-RCC communication/coordination provided by the Exec Sec.
- ICOs are also invited and encouraged to provide topic and content expertise to the initiative.
- Criteria for a SDOH RCC-Designated Activity:
 - Must be cross-cutting and broadly relevant across the NIH (applies to the mission or addresses gaps for multiple ICOs), with particular relevance to ICOs represented in EC membership.
 - Must be a SDOH research, resource, measurement, or training/capacity-building opportunity that is not sufficiently supported at the NIH.
 - Needs NIH-wide coordination and advancement that would not be feasible for an individual IC alone or where the field of SDOH research would be negatively impacted by a fragmented approach.
 - Emphasis will be given to activities that leverage existing SDOH investments (including both federal and non-federal partnerships), address important new areas of research, and enhance cross-NIH priorities.