

# Trustee Insights

## POPULATION HEALTH



## COVID-19 and Social Determinants of Health

### Addressing disparities in health outcomes

BY NANCY A. MYERS

As the pandemic evolves, preliminary data indicate that people in racial and ethnic minority groups and individuals with lower socioeconomic status are at an increased risk of serious illness and death related to COVID-19. Newly available data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that African Americans account for 33% of confirmed COVID-19 cases, while representing only 18% of the total population. Data coming from New York and other cities also are showing that African Americans are twice as likely to die from COVID-19, and the death rate for Latinos is over 1.5 times the rate of their white neighbors.

While COVID-19 is illuminating

disparities in health outcomes, it is not the cause of those disparities. Further, those of us who work every day in health care know that these disparities are not new. We see them in virtually all measures of health or illness.

Now more than ever, while staging our health systems to treat infected patients, we should revisit and reinforce the work that we are doing in and with our communities to address the underlying causes for the differences in health outcomes we are seeing in COVID-19. Focusing on these social determinants of health — stable housing and healthy neighborhoods, nutritious food, adequate transportation, and socioeconomic status — is something that our hospitals have

been doing for years as part of their community health needs assessments and improvement processes.

Your role as a trustee is more important than ever as you provide advice to your organization. We encourage you to visit or revisit these AHA resources:

- A [video series](#) designed to provide trustees with an overview of population health strategies and foundational capabilities that health care leaders are using to redesign care. The videos and accompanying discussion guide focus on the importance of understanding the social factors in your community that affect health for all.

- A recent *Trustee Insights* [article](#) that covers how boards can play a variety of roles to address social determinants and focus on community health.

- An [issue brief](#) that examines the impact of the social determinants of health on patients and communities as they battle the COVID-19 outbreak, with ideas and case examples to help hospitals address ongoing social needs.

Thank you for all that you do to support your community, each and every day. Your role as a community member and leader and a prominent voice of the community has never been more important.

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