

# CommUNITY HeartLink Houston

A Cardiovascular Community Resource

Johnson&Johnson

INTRODUCTION

UNDERSTANDING SDOH

CARDIOVASCULAR  
HEALTH EQUITY

RESOURCES  
FOR HEART HEALTH

GLOSSARY



# 01

## Introduction

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# 01 Introduction

Houstonians have the privilege of living in one of the most diverse and dynamic cities in America. Most U.S. cities face public health challenges worsened by disparities that impact minority communities at higher rates.<sup>1</sup>

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Heart Disease and Mortality map, heart disease, stroke, and their risk factors continue to be the number one cause of death among African American and Hispanic populations in the city of Houston and Harris County.<sup>2</sup> To better meet the growing needs of its most at-risk residents, the Houston community must tackle health disparities head-on to achieve health equity, community strength, and a future where heart health prevails for everyone, including ethnic minority and LGBTQ+ communities.

We at Johnson & Johnson aspire to transform lives by bringing lifesaving and life-changing solutions to people who need them. We're committed to providing safe and effective medicines as well as the services and support that contribute to healthy outcomes. Our **CommUNITY Heartlink-Houston Resource** is an extension of our work and commitment.

\*This list is not a complete list.

We've compiled a curated list\* of Houston-based cardiovascular disease (CVD) programs and services that address social determinants of health and leaned into our established initiatives such as [Our Race to Health Equity](#), a \$100 million, five-year commitment to end racial and social injustice as a public health threat for people of color.

Whether you're looking for CVD educational resources for individuals and their families, recommendations on lifestyle changes, or to understand the social determinants of health in greater Houston, the **CommUNITY Heartlink-Houston Resource** contains tools to help support the navigation of Houston's healthcare landscape. With this guide, each one of us can help and empower CVD patients to "own" their health and increase health literacy.

Our hope is that with these resources, you can better respond to the needs of overlooked and underserved Houston communities and help them achieve health equity. By doing so, we believe that a community of allies will be created who are committed to establishing a health care system in Houston that works for everyone.

**Heart disease, stroke, and their risk factors continue to be the number one cause of death among African American and Hispanic populations in the city of Houston and Harris County.<sup>2</sup>**





# 02

## Understanding the Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)





## 02

### Understanding the Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)

The social determinants of health (SDOH) are the non-medical factors that influence health outcomes. They are the environmental conditions that can impact the way people grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life such as economic policies, climate change, and political systems.<sup>3</sup>

Social and environmental factors play an important role in the health of everyone and can promote better health, weaken a person's health, or contribute to premature death. SDOH conditions are often grouped into domains: **economic stability, education access and quality, health care access and quality, neighborhood and built environment, and social and community context.**<sup>3</sup>

The **CommUNITY Heartlink-Houston Resource** focuses on the following SDOHs:

- Access to healthcare services
- Housing
- Transportation
- Food access



#### Access to healthcare services

One of the obstacles that people face in accessing health care is inadequate health insurance coverage. For example, in 2021, Hispanic or Latino people in the U.S. had among the highest uninsured rate in the nation at 17.7 percent.<sup>4</sup> This unequal distribution of coverage contributes to disparities in health, with people with lower incomes often being uninsured and minority groups accounting for over half of the uninsured population.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to insurance, factors like the ongoing shortage of healthcare providers and language barriers can further limit access to healthcare services needed to address CVD and dismantle health inequity.<sup>4</sup>

Transgender and gender nonconforming individuals might also experience discrimination when seeking CVD care in Houston. Growing evidence reveals LGBTQ adults experience disparities across several CVD risk factors compared with their cisgender heterosexual peers.<sup>5</sup>



These **Helpful Houston & Community Resources** can help those encountering barriers when accessing healthcare services:

- [African American Health Coalition](#)
- [Harris County Public Health Department](#)
- [Texas Medicaid and CHIP](#)
- [African American Male Wellness Agency \(AAMWA\) - Houston Location](#)



### Housing

Access to safe, quality, affordable housing—and the supports to maintain that housing—is one of the most basic social determinants of health. Studies have found that a person’s zip code is a better predictor of life expectancy than genetic code.<sup>6</sup> Inadequate housing conditions are associated with both physical and mental illnesses directly and indirectly. According to [Healthy People 2030](#), structural features of the home such as mold, pest infestation, peeling paint, or physical crowding directly impact health, while affordability—such as the fear of eviction or homelessness—may indirectly impact health.<sup>7,8</sup>



Chronic housing insecurity influences a person’s ability to eat properly, schedule regular medical care, or fill prescriptions due to cost. These factors all contribute to inadequate treatment to reduce cardiovascular risk factors such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and tobacco use, and to the greater likelihood of having a cardiovascular event such as a heart attack or stroke.<sup>9</sup>

Discharging a patient from a hospital to a safe and stable environment is critical for proper care, compliance with recommended treatments and medication regimes, and access to healthy foods and a place to rest and recuperate.

LGBTQ communities are also vulnerable to periods of homelessness. Housing programs that provide shelter and support services, including access to workforce development and medical and mental health care, are key for helping them take control of their lives.

These **Helpful Houston & Community Resources** can help provide emergency shelter as well as short-term, transitional and permanent housing for those experiencing homelessness:

- [Harris County Community Services Department](#)
- [Harris County Public Health](#)





### Transportation

Negative health effects related to the U.S. transportation system can fall hardest on vulnerable members of the community, such as low-income residents, minorities, children, persons with disabilities, and older adults.<sup>10</sup> Whether it's a trip to the grocery store for healthy food, to a doctor's appointment to get ahead of new symptoms, or to a local park to engage in a healthier, more social lifestyle, reliable and affordable transportation is a must.

While telehealth and the remote delivery of health care have their benefits, technology is not always accessible to all. When there is no access to a vehicle or public transit, individuals increasingly go without medical care, which leads to overall poorer health outcomes.<sup>11</sup>

These **Helpful Houston & Community Resources** can help individuals access affordable and reachable transportation options:

- [Texas Health and Human Services Medical Transportation Program](#)
- [Link Houston](#)







### Food access

Having access to nutritious food is a basic human need. A person experiences food insecurity when they have limited access to enough food and it impedes normal physical growth, becomes a barrier for having an active or healthy life, or impacts health outcomes.<sup>12</sup>

Highly processed foods that are energy-dense and high in saturated fats, sugars, and salt are often cheaper and easier to come by than fresh fruits and vegetables. Individuals living in urban and rural areas and low-income neighborhoods may have limited access to full-service supermarkets or grocery stores with healthier food options at an affordable price. These areas are known as food deserts.<sup>13</sup>

In some areas of Houston, over 50% of residents report traveling more than six miles to reach

the closest grocery store.<sup>14</sup> Adults who are food insecure may be at an increased risk for negative health outcomes that include obesity—a risk factor for CVD—and chronic disease.

These **Helpful Houston & Community Resources** can help individuals access nutritious food to improve their diet and health outcomes:

- [Food Trust—Houston](#)
- [City of Houston Food Insecurity Board](#)
- [Houston Health Department's Farmers Markets and Food Access](#)
- [Urban Harvest Farmers Market](#)
- [Ivy Leaf Farms—Fresh Houwse Grocery](#)
- [Houston Food Bank Pantry Locator](#)



### The link between social determinants of health and cardiovascular disease

A 2020 analysis<sup>15</sup> investigating the relationship between SDOH and ischemic strokes found communities with high rates of ischemic strokes also had poor rankings for health outcomes, health behaviors, physical environment, and socioeconomic factors, and communities with either air pollution measures or violent crime rates that exceeded the national average were significantly associated with ischemic stroke hospitalizations.

The burden of cardiovascular disease is higher for Black populations in the United States. In 2021, Non-Hispanic Black people had the highest percentage of all deaths caused by heart disease than any other ethnic group.<sup>16</sup>

The link between SDOH and CVD is clear but challenging to address. However, awareness of the social factors that influence an individual's health can inform approaches for CVD prevention.





Screening Tools

Socioeconomic inequalities are strong contributors to cardiovascular risk, and when making preventive treatment recommendations to patients, it is important to consider challenges that they may face in their environment.

There are a variety of tools that can be integrated into patient care workflows to screen for social determinants of health and collect data. While screening tools vary, they can help patients better navigate care and connect to the resources needed to treat CVD and improve health outcomes.<sup>17</sup>



Patient-centered screening tools can help determine the path forward for dismantling health inequity so that all Houstonians can attain their highest level of health.

EXAMPLE OF A SOCIAL NEEDS SCREENING TOOL

SOCIAL NEED SCREENING TOOL (Source: [Health Leads](#))

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

Preferred language \_\_\_\_\_ Best time to call \_\_\_\_\_

In the last 12 months, did you ever <b>eat less than you felt you should</b> because there wasn't enough money for food?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
In the last 12 months, has the <b>electric, gas, oil, or water company threatened to shut off your services</b> in your home?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
Are you worried that in the next 2 months, you <b>may not have stable housing</b> ?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
Do problems getting <b>child care make it difficult for you to work or study?</b> (Leave blank if you do not have children)	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
In the last 12 months, have you needed to see a doctor, <b>but could not because of cost</b> ?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
In the last 12 months, have you ever had to go without health care because you didn't have <b>a way to get there</b> ?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
Do you ever need help <b>reading hospital materials</b> ?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
Do you often feel that <b>you lack companionship</b> ?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
<b>Are any of your needs urgent?</b> For example: I don't have food tonight, I don't have a place to sleep tonight	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
If you checked YES to any boxes above, <b>would you like to receive assistance</b> with any of these needs?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO

# 03

## Cardiovascular Health Equity





# 03

## Cardiovascular Health Equity

One person dies every 33 seconds in the United States from cardiovascular disease.<sup>18</sup>

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for people in Texas, outpacing COVID-19, cancer, accidents and stroke.<sup>19</sup> In Harris County, for every 100,000 people, 308 die of heart disease each year.<sup>20</sup>

Fortunately, many forms of cardiovascular disease can be treated or potentially avoided in some cases. When people are empowered by understanding the common risk factors and symptoms of cardiovascular disease, they know what to look out for and when to seek care.

### Common risk factors

According to the Centers for Disease and Control and Prevention, the following are the most common risk factors for CVD:<sup>21</sup>



#### HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE AND HIGH CHOLESTEROL

High blood pressure damages the lining of the arteries, making them more susceptible to the buildup of plaque, which narrows the arteries leading to the heart and brain. High LDL (low density lipoprotein) cholesterol also limits blood flow to the heart, brain, kidneys, other organs, and legs.



#### DIABETES

Diabetes happens when the body doesn't make enough insulin or can't use it as well as it should, resulting in too much sugar staying in the bloodstream. Over time, high blood sugar can damage blood vessels in the heart and block blood vessels leading to the brain, causing a stroke.



#### SMOKING AND EXCESSIVE ALCOHOL USE

Smoking raises triglycerides (a type of fat in the blood), lowers high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol, also called "good" cholesterol, and makes blood sticky and more likely to clot. This can block blood flow to the heart and brain, damage cells that line the blood vessels, increase the buildup of plaque (fat, cholesterol, calcium, and other substances) in blood vessels, and cause blood vessels to thicken and narrow.

A resource that can help with learning more about tobacco and smoking cessation is [5 Steps to Quit Smoking and Vaping](#), from the national non-profit and public health organization, American Heart Association.



#### OBESITY, UNHEALTHY DIET, AND PHYSICAL INACTIVITY

Being overweight (body mass index of 25-30) or obese (body mass index over 30) puts a person at an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, and the risk factors of high blood pressure, high LDL cholesterol, low HDL cholesterol, high triglycerides, and type 2 diabetes. Eating an unhealthy diet high in saturated fats, trans fats, and cholesterol is also linked to heart disease.

Physical inactivity can also lead to heart disease, even for people with no other risk factors, because it can increase the chance of obesity, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and type 2 diabetes.

The [CDC's webpage on physical activity](#) outlines its benefits for improving brain health, managing weight, reducing the risk of disease, strengthening bones and muscles, and improving the ability to do everyday activities.

### Symptoms of CVD

CVD is sometimes called the “silent killer.” It is often not diagnosed until a person experiences signs or symptoms of a heart attack, heart failure, or an arrhythmia (irregular or abnormal rhythm of the heartbeat). When these happen, symptoms may include:<sup>22</sup>

- **Heart attack:** Chest pain or discomfort, upper back or neck pain, indigestion, heartburn, nausea or vomiting, extreme fatigue, upper body discomfort, dizziness, and shortness of breath.
- **Arrhythmia:** Fluttering feelings in the chest (palpitations).
- **Heart failure:** Shortness of breath, fatigue, or swelling of the feet, ankles, legs, abdomen, or neck veins.

To understand the lifestyle changes that can be made to help prevent or manage CVD, **see section 4, Empowering Lifestyle Changes.**

### How healthcare and community leaders can support CVD health equity

Healthcare providers play a key role in treating and managing cardiovascular disease to advance health equity for Black, Hispanic, or other minority populations disproportionately impacted by CVD.

With intentional and empathetic actions, healthcare providers along with community leaders can take small steps every day to mitigate inequities and make a major difference in the healthcare experience of marginalized populations.



### HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

- **Acknowledge unconscious bias and take part in training.** Unconscious bias—social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their conscious awareness—can influence medical decisions and affect healthcare delivery outcomes.<sup>23</sup> Healthcare providers can offer and participate in diversity training as part of a continuous learning process/investment for medical staff.

Johnson & Johnson offers various options to learn more about unconscious bias through the [J&J Institute for Professional Resources](#) including the [J&J Institute for Professional Resources Unconscious Bias Podcast](#).

- **Understand a patient’s level of health fluency.** Take time to communicate instructions around medications and lifestyle changes in ways that meet each patient’s level of fluency to minimize inefficiency and frustration. Use interpreters when appropriate to ensure critical information about CV risk factors, symptoms, and prevention is not lost.

An additional resource for understanding health fluency and health literacy is [5 Things to Know About Health Literacy video](#) from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Healthy People 2030 initiative.

- **Center social determinants of health at the core of patient care.** Improve patient health and reduce health disparities by adopting screening tools within medical practices to help identify unmet patient needs.





### COMMUNITY LEADERS

- **Serve as a liaison for marginalized and hard-to-reach members of the community.** Leverage your network and connections to direct people to appropriate CVD care and resources.
- **Build relationships with schools, faith-based organizations, elected officials, community health workers, gyms, and grocery stores.** Share best practices and data to coordinate efforts and better understand the characteristics and needs of specific neighborhoods.
- **Make it easy for people at an increased risk of CVD to discuss their experiences, successes and challenges.** Schedule regular meetings or forums at venues that can be easily accessed by community members.
- **Share training opportunities and CVD resources with stakeholders from all backgrounds.** Help community residents develop their skills and increase their knowledge of cardiovascular conditions and risk factors.



Providing individuals with easy-to-understand educational resources about CVD risk factors and symptoms can help them better manage conditions, make informed decisions about their care, and improve their overall health outcomes.



# 04

## Empowering Lifestyle Changes





## 04 Empowering Lifestyle Changes: Houston Resources for Heart Health

Lifestyle changes can prevent, treat, and reverse many of the chronic conditions that are leading causes of morbidity and mortality, including cardiovascular disease (CVD).<sup>24</sup> Empowering individuals in their care after a CVD diagnosis teaches them self-management skills that can improve their quality of life.

There are affordable and practical changes a person can make in their lifestyle to lower the risk of CVD, as well as useful Houston resources to help individuals adopt lifestyle changes tailored to their specific needs or goals.

### Eating a heart-healthy diet low in saturated and trans fats

- [It's Time Texas](#) offers free telehealth coaching in Spanish and English that helps support health goals.

### Being physically active (including a supervised exercise program)

- Many organizations offer free or low-cost group exercise classes. [Discovery Green Park](#) hosts free outdoor group classes including yoga and other activities.
- For at-home workouts, free videos online include [Cardio Workout for Beginners from Home in 10 Minutes](#) or [25 Minute Home Cardio Workout, No Equipment](#).

### Managing stress and maintaining mental well-being

- [The Harris Center](#) offers behavioral health support and counseling, including crisis support.
- For 24/7 support, those in need can text “TX” to 741741 to be connected to the crisis line.

### Stopping smoking and reducing alcohol consumption

- Community members can obtain a referral for free smoking cessation support with [Texas Quitline Referral](#) and counseling via their providers OR by calling 1 (877) YES-QUIT / 1 (877)937-7848.

### Managing Type 2 diabetes and blood sugar levels and controlling blood pressure

- [The DAWN center](#) provides free diabetes self-management education for Houstonians.



Combatting CVD is not just about medical treatments, but daily choices. Incremental lifestyle choices empower individuals by giving them control over their health to become active participants in the health care process.



# 05

## Glossary





**Cardiovascular Disease (CVD):** A general term that describes a disease of the heart or blood vessels. There are four main types of CVD: coronary heart disease, stroke, peripheral arterial disease, and aortic disease. [Source: [Cardiovascular Diseases | CDC](#)]<sup>25</sup>

**CVD:** See cardiovascular disease.

**Food Desert:** An area with limited access to affordable and nutritious foods, particularly an area composed of predominantly lower-income neighborhoods and communities. [Source: [Defining Low-Income, Low-Access Food Areas \(Food Deserts\) | Congress.Gov](#)]<sup>26</sup>

**Food Insecurity:** Having limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways. [Source: [USDA ERS-Measurement](#)]<sup>27</sup>

**Health Equity:** Health equity means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. To achieve this requires removing obstacles to health such as poverty and discrimination, and their consequences, including powerlessness and lack of access to good jobs with fair

pay, quality education and housing, safe environments, and health care. [Source: [What is Health Equity? \(cdc.gov\)](#)]<sup>28</sup>

**Homelessness:** An individual or family is experiencing homelessness if they lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, such as emergency shelters, transitional housing, or places not meant for habitation. [Source: [Definitions of Homelessness | SOAR Works! \(samhsa.gov\)](#)]<sup>29</sup>

**SDOH:** See social determinants of health.

**Social Determinants of Health (SDOH):** The non-medical factors that influence health outcomes. They are the environmental conditions that can impact the way people grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life such as economic policies, climate change, and political systems. [Source: [Social Determinants of Health at CDC | About | CDC](#)]<sup>30</sup>

**Telehealth:** Allows a health care provider to care for patients without an in-person office visit, primarily online with internet access on computer, tablet, or smartphone. Also known as telemedicine. [Source: [What is telehealth? | Telehealth.HHS.gov](#)]<sup>31</sup>

## Johnson & Johnson's Commitment to Health Equity and Transformation of Healthcare

Johnson & Johnson aspires to help eradicate racial and social injustice as a public health threat by eliminating health inequities for people of color. The Company has committed \$100 million over the next five years to invest in and promote health equity solutions. [Our Race to Health Equity](#) was launched with the bold ambition that, together, we can create a world where the color of your skin is not a determinant of your access to care, quality of care, or health outcomes.

You can learn more about Johnson & Johnson initiatives that help advance health equity and transform healthcare at:

- [Breathe In. Speak Out About Pulmonary Arterial Hypertension](#) is a space to connect, find resources, and encourage honest conversations in the fight against pulmonary arterial hypertension (PAH).
- [Telehealth 101](#) for patients helps patients prepare for telehealth appointments and feel comfortable when discussing healthcare symptoms and care recommendations.
- [My Health Can't Wait](#) is a community wellness initiative expanding access to vital health information and support for patients and caregivers in communities of color.
- [Save Legs. Save Lives™](#) Spot Peripheral Artery Disease Now initiative raises awareness about this serious condition and encourages screening to make sure it doesn't go undiagnosed.
- [What your BMI means to you](#) is a resource for understanding body mass index and obesity.
- [Johnson & Johnson Institute](#) provides both physical and virtual learning centers worldwide for professional medical education and training.
- [Our Commitment to Nurses](#) has advocated for, elevated, and empowered nurses for over 125 years.

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