

# Beyond Medicine: Reach Out and Read + Social Determinants of Health



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## SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

The social determinants of health are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life. These factors impact individual and community health and wellbeing.

Our health is determined in part by access to social and economic opportunities; the resources and supports available in our homes, neighborhoods, and communities; the quality of our schooling; the safety of our workplaces; the cleanliness of our water, food, and air; and the nature of our social interactions and relationships. The conditions in which we live explain in part why some Americans are healthier than others and why Americans more generally are not as healthy as they could be.

Almost half of young children in the United States live in poverty or near poverty. According to 2014 Census data, an estimated 21.1% of all US children younger than 18 years lived in households designated as “poor” (incomes below 100% of the federal poverty level – FPL) and 42.9% lived in households designated as “poor, near poor, or low income” (incomes up to 200% of the FPL). Nearly 9.3% lived in households of deep poverty (incomes below 50% of the FPL). Poverty and related social determinants of health can lead to adverse health outcomes in childhood and across the life course, negatively affecting physical health, socioemotional development, and educational achievement.

## WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE PROVIDER?

A major part of the work of primary care providers is to prevent poor health and promote well-being. Primary care practices that provide pediatric preventative healthcare are critical points-of-contact for children and their families. Practices must consider risks that are rooted in poverty as they determine how to best deliver family-centered care and move toward action on the social determinants of health.

Primary care providers are ideal points of access to provide surveillance and early intervention for environmental stressors (social determinants of health) for infants, children, and families. With an awareness and understanding of the effects of poverty, they can assess the financial stability of families, link families to resources, and coordinate care with community partners. Primary care providers use interventions, like Reach Out and Read to ask nonintrusive questions and open the door to discuss sensitive topics with families. They use the evidence-based model to have a positive impact in their communities.

## HOW CAN REACH OUT AND READ HELP PROVIDERS?

Reach Out and Read’s two-generation approach helps move primary care to a more comprehensive approach to child and family health. Providers use a valuable tool, books and anticipatory guidance, to talk to parents and other caregivers about what’s happening in their life; challenges and opportunities, and the benefits of reading aloud to their young children. The effects of literacy promotion on early brain development, including improved language skills and school readiness, are well-documented.

Prevention requires interventions that can best help families mitigate the impact of poverty related risks in ways that promote long-term health and well-being for children. Reach Out and Read is also a tool for the family. The book is a family bonding tool that also supports language acquisition and brain development. Book sharing is a concrete way families can spend positive time together to help mitigate stresses, increase buffering and build resiliency. The age appropriate book, which may not be available in some homes also serves as a springboard for observation and discussion of difficult topics.

## RECOMMENDED READING: [The Elephant in the Clinic](#)

To learn more about the value of Reach Out and Read in Pediatric Primary Care, please visit [www.rorcarolinas.org](http://www.rorcarolinas.org).

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