

Children's Wisconsin screening for health-related social needs at Fox Valley Hospital and beyond

Children's Wisconsin has long recognized and addressed the social drivers of health, factors outside of medical care such as access to food, stable housing and transportation, which can have a significant impact on a child's health, functioning, quality of life and overall health outcomes. Children with unmet social needs may be less likely to receive preventive care and be more likely to experience hospital stays, readmission and emergency department visits. Over the last few years, a standardized, coordinated screening approach has been developed to help identify these needs and connect families with support.

Children's Wisconsin is gradually expanding screening across the system, with the goal of screening all patients at least once a year through the electronic health record. Families can answer brief questions about their food security, housing stability, finances, transportation, firearm safety and health literacy. If a family identifies a need and asks for assistance, Children's Wisconsin team members can connect them with community resources, practical support or other Children's Wisconsin services. Screening and support are provided at no cost to families.

The Children's Wisconsin's Fox Valley Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) is one of the first sites to implement the screening, with the Fox Valley Pediatric Unit expected to follow. Members of the Fox Valley NICU Social Work team work with families to complete the screening and social workers then follow-up with families who are interested in receiving additional support. Responses and follow-up are documented confidentially in the patient's health record so care teams can better support the family now and in the future.

The Social Work team at Children's Wisconsin's Fox Valley Hospital knows that many families we work with face struggles outside of the hospital walls. Screening for social needs isn't new, but documenting those needs in the electronic health record makes it easier for care teams to understand and respond to a family's needs as they receive care.

By expanding social needs screening across the system, Children's Wisconsin is helping families with the resources and support they need so every child has the opportunity to be healthy and thrive.