



TOWN OF WESTFORD  
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## **Ask the Nurse January 2026 Social Determinants of Health**

### **What are Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)?**

Social Determinants of Health are the everyday things in people's lives that affect how healthy we are. These include where people grow up, where we live, where we go to school, work, where we spend our free time, practice our faith, and where we age. Together, these factors can affect health outcomes, quality of life, and risk of disease.

Healthy People 2030 groups Social Determinants of Health into five key areas that help explain how social and environmental factors impact health:

- Having enough money and stable employment
- Access to good education
- Access to quality health care
- Safe neighborhoods, housing, and transportation
- Support from family, friends, and the community

### **What does this mean?**

In simple terms, being healthy is about more than going to the doctor. Things like safe housing, reliable transportation, healthy foods, good schools, and strong and supportive relationships all play a major role in keeping people healthy.

Accessing health care can be confusing and stressful. Many people struggle with:

- Understanding health insurance and what is and what isn't covered
- Knowing which doctor to see and waiting a long time for appointments
- Paying for medications and remembering when to take them

Other challenges include:

- Difficulty understanding medical information or diagnosis
- Language and education barriers
- Appointments that feel rushed or impersonal

Because of this, patients may leave the doctor feeling confused, unsure of what questions to ask, or uncertain about what to do next, which is why it is important to bring someone with you to help with



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advocacy, and support. Having another person with you can help reduce stress. A second set of ears can listen to what is being said, help remember important information, to ask clarifying questions on your behalf, if needed.

These challenges are linked to Social Determinants of Health. When people struggle with insurance, finding the right care, affording medications, or understanding their doctor, long wait times, and rushed visits can make getting care even harder.

**Westford has local services that support residents:**

- Westford Food Pantry provides free groceries and essentials to Westford residents.
- Westford Health Department offers public health education, disease prevention initiatives, immunizations, and health resources, provides school and senior dental health services, and safe medication and sharps disposal.
- Community Wellness programs help with local support, for example mental health outreach and substance use resources.
- Westford Coalition for Non-Violence (WCNV) offers educational services on domestic violence. This Coalition's mission, "to promote healthy relationships and foster a culture of non-violence for all members of our community."
- The Cameron Transportation Service offers rides (older adults and people with disabilities) to grocery stores or medical appointments.
- Westford has a town Social Worker that can assist residents with direct support, resources, referrals for residents facing challenges, mental health crisis, fuel assistance, elder care, or financial hardship.
- Westford's Public Health Nurse manages communicable diseases, runs community vaccination clinics, provides health education, plans for emergency preparedness, and connects residents with resources. In addition, teaches classes, writes educational articles "Ask the Nurse" found on the Westford CAT, and offers blood pressure screenings at the Council on Aging and at the Health Department.
- Veterans Services to serve veterans and their families.
- Westford has 10 faith organizations/religious groups, and many more in the surrounding communities.
- Westford is ranked among the top school districts in Massachusetts from elementary to high school.
- Westford has 24 easy hiking trails around town, multiple playgrounds, beaches, summer camps, farmer's market, Apple Blossom, Strawberry festival, Westford Education Foundation-Westfest, health fairs, Roudenbush Community Center, and Recreation Department, library, skiing, golf, and Kimbal Farm.

By offering local services and resources, Westford works to reduce barriers and support a healthier community for all.



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\*The information above was taken from various sources, to explain Social Determinants of Health (SDH). This information is meant to be truthful, accurate, & educational and not meant to misrepresent any article previously written and submitted.  
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