# Patient engagement in social needs screening and referrals by screening approach, clinical service, and language

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**Background:** Our prior research revealed patient engagement barriers during social needs (SNs) screening and community service referral processes.

**Objective:** To evaluate patient engagement with SN screenings and a community referral service by screening approach, clinical service, and language.

**Methods:** Between July 2022-July 2024, 28,150 screeners were completed (93% English, 7% Spanish), after which interested patients were referred for telephonic community service outreach. Screening and referral protocols included: 1) in-person by research associates in adult and pediatric EDs, 2) through MyChart messaging after COVID testing, and 3) through pre-visit MyChart messaging and in-person staff reinforcement during prenatal and postpartum care.

**Results:** Across all sites,10,670 (38%) screened positive for at least one need. The adult ED had the highest (41%), while those obtaining COVID testing had the lowest (13%) percentage of those with needs wanting outreach. Descriptively, both EDs had higher follow-up contact rates for those interested in outreach (33% and 30%, respectively) compared to routine prenatal and postpartum care (26%) and COVID testing (27%).

While 35% of English-speakers with at least one need desired service referrals, 30% made contact. In contrast, 70% of Spanish-speakers expressed interest in service referrals, and 47% made contact. Willingness to answer individual screening questions varied between English and Spanish-speaking patients across all sites. English-speaking patients generally had low non-response rates. Spanish-speaking patients exhibited higher non-response rates, particularly for screening questions related to clothing/furniture (15.1%) and rent/mortgage (15.1%) at COVID testing.

**Conclusion:** These findings reveal the need for culturally sensitive SN screening and referral approaches. While our findings indicate a higher interest and slightly better follow-up rates among Spanish-speakers, they also suggest that Spanish-speaking patients might face more discomfort or barriers in discussing specific social needs. This underscores the importance of developing and implementing culturally sensitive approaches that effectively engage and support this population.