



# Social Prescribing: Addressing the Social Determinants of Health

PANELISTS

Dr. Luke Kyne • Dr. Ritika Goel • Dr. Dominik Nowak

WITH

Dr. Nikki Bozinoff • Natasha Beaudin



**Mental Health  
and Addictions**

August 27, 2025

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# Your Panelists: Disclosures

## Dr. Luke Kyne

- Relationships with financial sponsors (including honoraria): OCFP Practising Well CoP speaker

## Dr. Ritika Goel

- Relationships with financial sponsors (including honoraria): OCFP Practising Well CoP speaker

## Dr. Dominik Nowak

- Relationships with financial sponsors (including honoraria): OCFP Practising Well CoP speaker, Alliance for Healthier Communities, Canada Health Infoway, Centre for Effective Practice, Ontario Medical Association, McMaster University, TELUS, UofT and Women's College Hospital

# Disclosures

## Dr. Nikki Bozinoff @NikkiBozinoff

Relationships with financial sponsors & Research Grant Funding (including honoraria) :

- Ontario College of Family Physicians – Practising Well Implementation Group Member, CoP Speaker
- META:PHI for guideline review (OUD)
- Womenmind
- Department of Family and Community Medicine (University of Toronto)
- CFPC
- CAMH Foundation
- CIHR

## Natasha Beaudin

Relationships with financial sponsors (including honoraria):

- Ontario College of Family Physicians – CoP Moderator
- Alliance for Healthier Communities - Employer
- Walton's Trust, Medavie Foundation – Project Funders

# Mitigating Bias

## Disclosure of financial support



This program has received funding from the Ontario Ministry of Health and in-kind support from the Ontario College of Family Physicians and the Department of Family and Community Medicine, University of Toronto.

## Potential conflicts



N/A

## Mitigating potential bias



The Scientific Planning Committee (SPC) has control over the choice of topics and speakers.

Content has been developed according to the standards and expectations of the Mainpro+ certification program.

The program content was reviewed by the SPC.

# Practising Well Self-Learning Program

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Earn **1-credit-per-hour** for reviewing the recording and resources from **past CoP sessions**. The self-learning program is certified for up to 63 Mainpro+ credits.



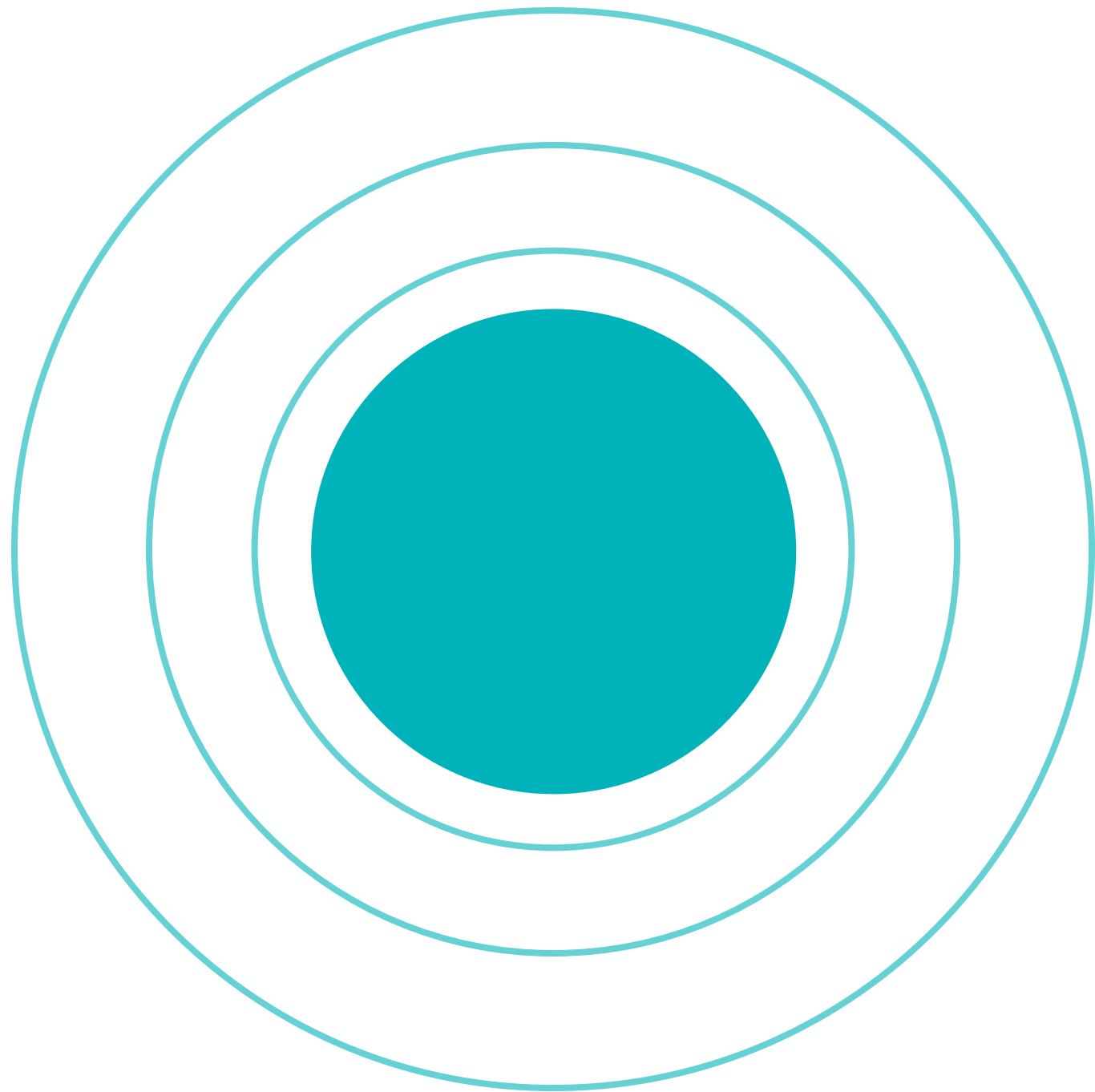
**Learn More and  
Participate**

# Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the lands on which we are hosting this meeting include the traditional territories of many nations.

The OCFP, DFCM and the Alliance for Healthier Communities recognize that the many injustices experienced by the Indigenous Peoples of what we now call Canada continue to affect their health and well-being. The OCFP, DFCM and the Alliance for Healthier Communities respects that Indigenous people have rich cultural and traditional practices that have been known to improve health outcomes.

I invite all of us to reflect on the territories you are calling in from as we commit ourselves to gaining knowledge; forging a new, culturally safe relationship; and contributing to reconciliation.





# Your Panelists



Dr. Luke Kyne

Dr. Ritika Goel

Dr. Dominik Nowak

**Social Prescribing: Addressing the Social Determinants of Health**

# OCFP Practising Well

## **Social Prescribing: Addressing the Social Determinants of Health**

**Luke Kyne, MD CCFP**

Emergency Medicine Physician, Michael Garron Hospital  
Co-Founder & Chair (Board of Directors), The Hub  
Hamilton

# Why Social Prescribing?

- **FM & EM Physician, MGH (Toronto)**
- **Co-Founder, The Hub**
- Witnessed patients' health suffer due to **unmet social needs**
- Co-founded The Hub to provide **social supports** for high-risk youth & individuals experiencing homelessness

# What *Is* Social Prescribing?

- **Definition:** Connecting patients to non-medical, community-based services as part of their health care
- **Purpose:** Address social and economic factors (housing, food, loneliness, etc.) that affect health but can't be fixed with a traditional prescription
- **How it works:** A health provider “prescribes” a social program or support (e.g., exercise group, food bank, counseling)

# Why It Matters for Family Physicians

- Many health issues **won't improve** if social needs are unmet
- Issues like social isolation, food insecurity, or poverty contribute heavily to illness, but family doctors often feel **poorly equipped** to address them
- Burnout and frustration can arise when we see patients' health stagnate due to **social barriers** we haven't tackled

# Key Areas for Social Prescribing

- Food Insecurity
- Housing Instability
- Social Isolation
- Mental Health
- Addictions
- Disability Support
- Employment & Education
- Arts, Culture, & Creativity
- Transportation
- Legal Aid
- Financial Support
- Family Services

# Social Prescribing in Ontario

- **Rx: Community** by the Alliance for Healthier Communities (2018-19)
- Social prescribing pilot showed **measurable benefits**
- **11** community health centres; **1,100+** patients received **~3,300** social prescriptions
  - **12%** improvement in **mental health**
  - **49%** decrease in **loneliness**
  - **19%** increase in **community activity engagement**

# Practical Tips for Primary Care

- Start the **conversation**
- Use available **directories**
- Leverage your **team**
- **Follow-up** referrals
- Know your **limits**
- Ask for **help** early



# Your Panelists



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**Social Prescribing: Addressing the Social Determinants of Health**

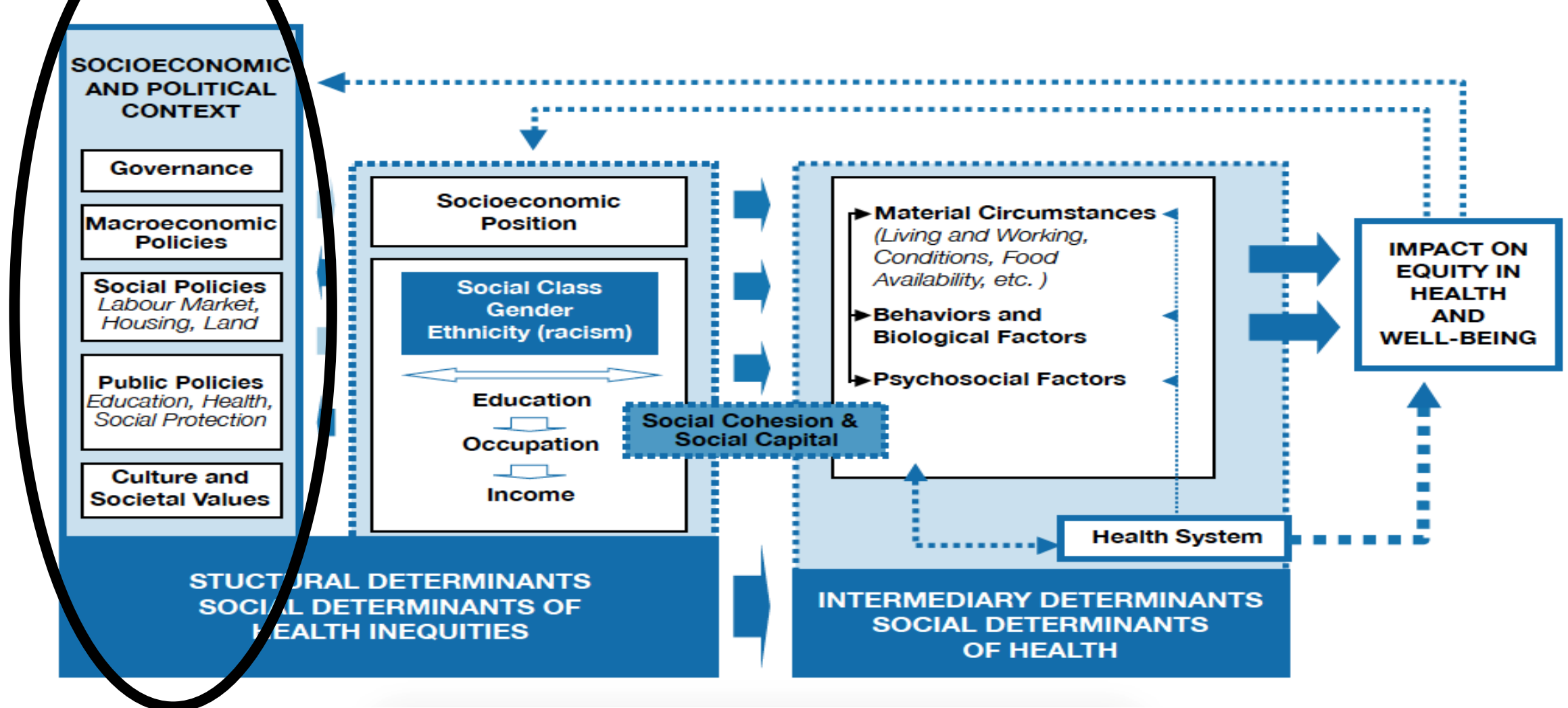
# What brought me to social prescribing?

Dr. Ritika Goel, MDP MPH CCFP

St. Michael's Hospital Academic Family Health Team,  
Department of Family and Community Medicine,  
University of Toronto

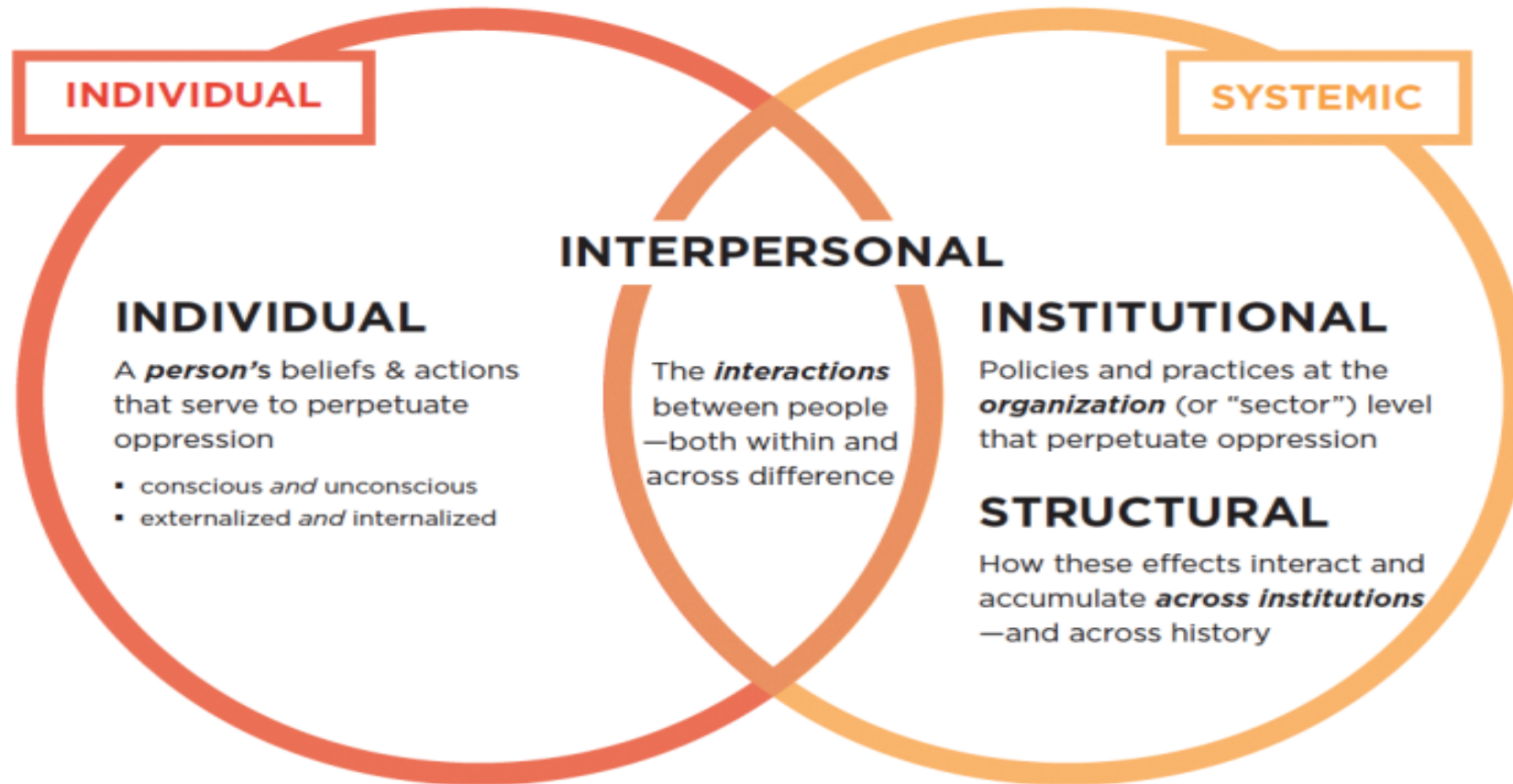
# Symptoms of Deeper Societal Issues

Figure A. Final form of the CSDH conceptual framework



WHO. Conceptual Framework for Action on the Social Determinants of Health. 2010.

# Lens of Systemic Oppression



# High-yield practical interventions in income

- Step 1: Ask! - You can't intervene if you don't know your patient's income, employment and socioeconomic status
- Step 2: Know the benefits at a high level and what we can do to intervene

# A Social History Tool using the IF-IT-HELPS mnemonic

This tool is designed as a reference, teaching and practice tool to assist in performing a social history in the context of healthcare provision. It is to be used as a guide for assessment and intervention, as opposed to a checklist.

## GENERAL APPROACH:

Strive to use a non-judgmental and attentive manner that creates a safe space for a patient to share, and build trust and rapport. Try to ask open-ended questions in a narrative manner, explaining the reason for certain questions and normalizing the process. Ensure that patients are aware their information is confidential and they are under no obligation to answer. Consider leaving the most sensitive topics (e.g. trauma) to emerge naturally in conversation or for when there is good rapport. Be self-reflective about your potential unconscious biases and work to mitigate them striving for using an anti-oppressive and culturally safe approach. Consider gathering information over several visits and documenting the social history in the patient chart for ongoing use and updating.

Potential Opening Statements or Questions		Potential Interventions	
I	<b>IDENTITY</b>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Tell me about yourself.</b></li><li>• Where were you born? Where did you grow up? What is your ethnic background?</li><li>• Do you have any aboriginal or indigenous heritage?</li><li>• What language are you most comfortable speaking in?</li><li>• Is faith or spirituality a big part of your life?</li><li>• How do you identify in terms of sexual orientation?</li><li>• What gender pronouns do you prefer (he/she/they, her/him/them)?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• ID clinics</li><li>• Professional interpretation</li><li>• ESL classes and settlement services</li><li>• Indigenous services</li><li>• Culturally-specific services</li><li>• LGBTQ services</li><li>• Youth services</li><li>• Seniors services</li></ul>	
F	<b>FAMILY AND FRIENDS</b>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Are there people in your life you can count on for support?</b></li><li>• Who lives with you at home?</li><li>• Do you have children? Who helps you with child care?</li><li>• What is your relationship like with your family? Your parents? Your siblings? Your children?</li><li>• Are you currently in a relationship?</li><li>• Tell me about your past relationships.</li><li>• Do you have a case manager or worker?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Case management referral or connecting with existing case manager</li><li>• Early years or parenting centre drop-ins</li><li>• Community drop-in centres</li><li>• Seniors groups</li><li>• Parenting groups</li><li>• Potential identification of trauma or safety issues (see below)</li></ul>	
I	<b>INCOME</b>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Do you ever have difficulty making ends meet at the end of the month?</b></li><li>• What are your current sources of income?</li><li>• Do you ever run out of money to buy food?</li><li>• Do you have trouble paying for public transportation?</li><li>• Do you have access to a phone or a place to leave messages?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Using the <a href="#">Poverty Tool</a> to find benefits</li><li>• Assistance with income benefits forms</li><li>• Suggesting filing income taxes</li><li>• Referral to food banks or meal programs</li><li>• Completing transportation forms/letter</li></ul>	
T	<b>TRAUMA</b> Consider leaving the most sensitive topics to emerge naturally in conversation or for when there is good rapport.		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Have you had any significant negative experiences in your life that have left a lasting emotional impact on you?</b></li><li>• Have you ever experienced or witnessed violence of any kind?</li><li>• Did you ever feel unsafe during your childhood, or in any of your relationships?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Using a trauma-informed approach - communicating safety</li><li>• Counselling or trauma therapy</li><li>• Assessing mental health and safety</li><li>• Understanding a patient's health risks based on Adverse Childhood Experiences</li></ul>	

Potential Opening Statements or Questions		Potential Interventions	
H	<b>HOUSING</b>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Where are you staying right now?</b></li><li>• When did you last have a stable place to stay?</li><li>• Do you need help finding housing?</li><li>• What is your housing like?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Referral to emergency shelter</li><li>• Drop in services</li><li>• Housing worker</li><li>• Legal clinic</li><li>• Tailoring care to challenges of homelessness</li></ul>	
E	<b>EMPLOYMENT</b>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Are you working right now?</b></li><li>• What do you do for work? What other kinds of work have you done in the past?</li><li>• Do you have benefits such as drug coverage?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Resume-writing services</li><li>• Employment counselling services</li><li>• Ensuring medications are covered or low-cost</li></ul>	
	<b>EDUCATION</b>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>How far did you go in your education?</b></li><li>• How did you do in school?</li><li>• Do you have any trouble reading or writing?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Literacy classes</li><li>• Tailoring patient information and communication</li><li>• Developmental assessment and services</li></ul>	
L	<b>LEGAL</b>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Do you have any legal issues you need help with?</b></li><li>• What is your current immigration status in Canada?</li><li>• Have you had contact with the legal system?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Legal clinics</li><li>• Immigration support services</li></ul>	
P	<b>PERSONAL SAFETY</b>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Do you have any safety concerns?</b></li><li>• Do you feel safe in your relationship?</li><li>• Has your partner ever hurt you? Your children?</li><li>• Do you feel safe in your home / neighbourhood?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Violence Against Women services</li><li>• Crisis helplines</li><li>• Legal services</li><li>• Counselling</li><li>• Support groups</li></ul>	
S	<b>SUBSTANCES</b>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Do you smoke? How many cigarettes a day?</b></li><li>• How often do you drink alcohol? How many drinks on average?</li><li>• Do you use any recreational drugs? What about in the past?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Motivational interviewing and pharmacological therapies</li><li>• Support groups and counselling</li><li>• Inpatient and outpatient rehab and programs</li><li>• Detox and harm reduction services</li></ul>	
	<b>SEXUAL HEALTH</b>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Are you sexually active?</b></li><li>• How many sexual partners have you had in the past six months?</li><li>• What kinds of sexual activities do you usually engage in? Vaginal intercourse? Anal sex? Oral sex?</li><li>• Have you ever had any sexually transmitted infections?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• STI screening based on exposure history</li><li>• Contraceptive counselling</li><li>• Barrier protection counselling</li></ul>	

Content by Dr. Ritika Goel, MD, MPH, CCFP

**SOURCE:** Goel R, Buchman S, Meili R, Woodland R. Social accountability at the micro level: One patient at a time. Can Fam Physician 2016;62:287-90 (Eng), 299-302 (Fr).  
**SOURCE:** Centres for Disease Control. A Guide to Taking a Sexual History. <https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/sexualhistory.pdf>

Concept adapted from Kenyon C, Sandel M, Silverstein M, Shakir A, Zuckerman B. Revisiting the social history for child health. Pediatrics 2007;120:e734-8 and Hager ER, Quigg AM, Block MM, et al Development and Validity of a 2-Item Screen to Identify Families at Risk for Food Insecurity Pediatrics 2010;126:e26-e32.

# Tips for asking..

- Use the social history section of your EMR
- Make a stamp with the headings of IFITHELPS and update them as you get new information
- Standardly ask about social context when you meet a new patient and probe when it is appropriate on other visits
- Signpost – “I always find it helpful to know a bit more about my patient’s lives so I know how best to help..”

# Example

- Identity: Bangladeshi, speaks English, came to Canada 2010
- Family and friends: Wife and 3 sons in Canada, one brother in Canada, parents in Bangladesh
- Income: On OW, applying for ODSP, did SD/transportation
- Trauma: \*
- Housing: Apartment, TCHC, living w/ wife and 3 sons
- Employment: Has driven cabs
- Education: Finished high school
- Legal: No issues
- Safety: No issues
- Substances: Smoking – none, Etoh – none, Drugs – no current
- Sexual health: Active with wife, use condoms



# Example

- Identity: Born in Canada, mother Filipino, father white Canadian, non-binary, they/them
- Family and friends: Parents in Windsor, left home at 16, poor relationship, two siblings, not in contact
- Income: On ODSP, getting SD/MSN, did DTC
- Trauma: Sig childhood abuse (physical/emotional), bullying in high school, homeless x 2y
- Housing: Transitional housing for trans youth
- Employment: Not working currently
- Education: Wants to go to art school
- Legal: None
- Safety: Feels unsafe in housing
- Substances: Smoking – 1ppd, Etoh – binges 5-7 drinks weekly, Drugs – recreational shrooms, past crack use
- Sexual health: One partner (sperm-producing), last STI testing 2024 neg

# OW/ODSP recipients

- Special Diet forms – don't forget to update them if a new condition is diagnosed
- Mandatory Special Necessities forms
- Letters for discretionary funds – \*air conditioner\*, Rx for various items like orthotics, compression stockings, other medical supplies
- OHIP-covered physiotherapy
- Dental care for ODSP – find a dentist who accepts ODSP!

# Applying for ODSP

- Red flag - If someone has been on OW x a few years
- Always consider if a psychiatric assessment is worth doing
- Include your notes, documents from specialists, hospitalizations, therapy, physio if can be accessed
- Write a letter that paints the general picture and append
- Complete the scales considering \*functional impairment\* – eg. Depression/substance use disorder often severely impairs grooming, ability to prepare meals, grocery shop, engage in social interactions
- 80% rejected in first round, encourage patient to do internal review, and if declined, connect with their community legal clinic to go to the Social Benefits Tribunal

# Disability Tax Credit

- CRA will pay back taxes paid up to 10 years in one time payout
- Ongoing decrease tax burden for the patient or a caregiver
- Can open an RDSP – very helpful for anyone <49yo
- Can access CDCP (federal dental plan)
- \*NEW\* Canada Disability Grant – up to \$200/mo for everyone with valid DTC

# DTC – how to apply

- Patient can start online application process and provide you a reference number
- Can look up application and print in office – need patient's SIN number and signature
- Based on functional impairment – very helpful to provide specific examples and illustrations

Eg. Patient gets easily overwhelmed when going into the community to complete tasks such as grocery shopping due to anxiety disorder

# Your Panelists



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# Social Rx

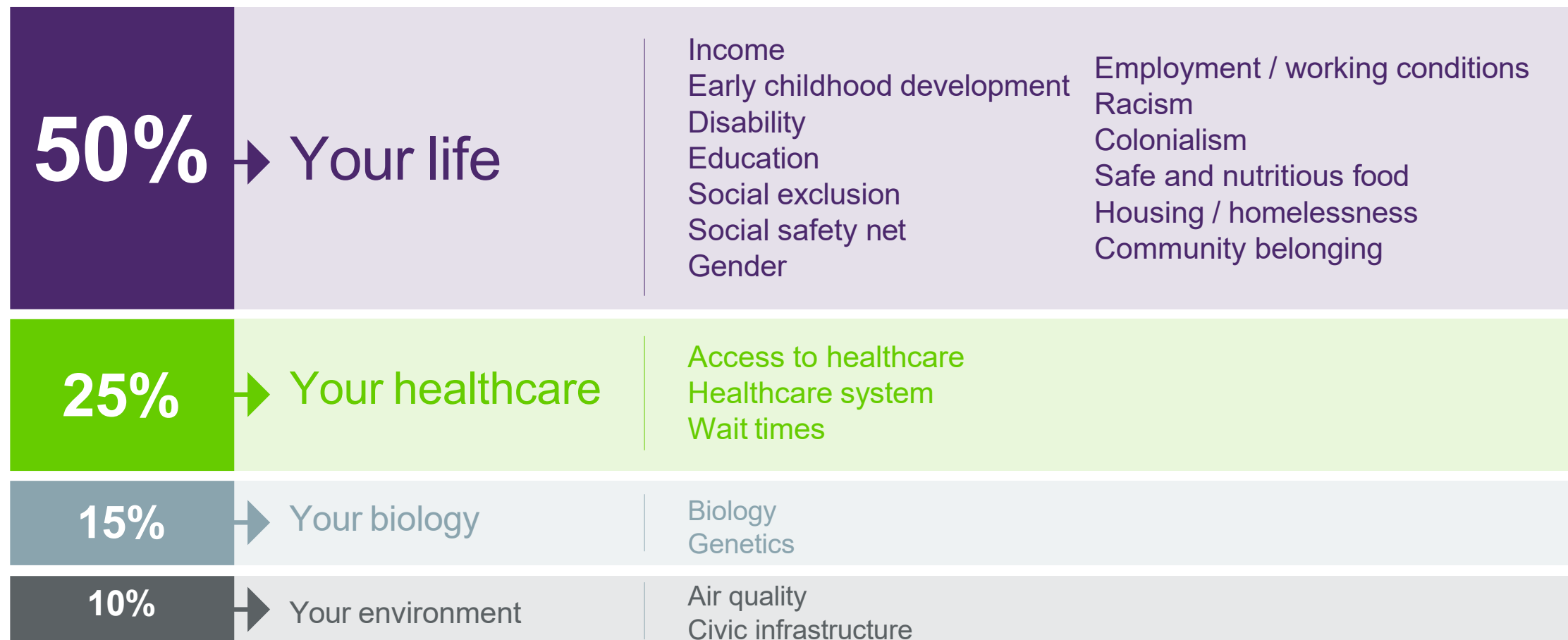
Dr. Dominik  
Nowak  
@DominikNowakMD







# What makes Canadians sick?



These are Canada's determinants of health.

# Social Prescribing: a Resource for Health Professionals

🕒 Last Updated: October 11, 2023

Search Content 🔍

Developed by:



This resource is designed to support health professionals working in primary care to implement social prescribing in their practice. This resource brings together the best available evidence and expert opinion to provide guidance on social prescribing. To accompany the resource, a 30 minute [online training module](#) (short registration required) with case studies is available to support implementation and enhance the learning experience.

Expand All

Introduction to social prescribing



Assess and understand the social factors impacting health



Initiate social prescribing



After social prescribing: follow-up and follow through



References

cep.health/social-prescribing

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# Resources Tools



Links to resources shared today will be sent to participants following the session.

# Tools and Resources

Resource	Link
211 Ontario - Quickly find social services across Ontario for a variety of different issues.	<a href="https://211ontario.ca/search/">https://211ontario.ca/search/</a>
Centre for Effective Practice - Excellent tool that helps clinicians screen for poverty in their practices; also integrates with various EMRs.	<a href="https://cep.health/clinical-products/poverty-a-clinical-tool-for-primary-care-providers/">https://cep.health/clinical-products/poverty-a-clinical-tool-for-primary-care-providers/</a>
Women's College Hospital - Offers support for clinicians managing patients with addictions, including guidelines, toolkits, and RAAM clinic info.	<a href="https://www.metaphi.ca/">https://www.metaphi.ca/</a>
Social Prescribing Resource	<a href="https://cep.health/clinical-products/social-prescribing/">https://cep.health/clinical-products/social-prescribing/</a>
Social Prescribing – Free Online Course, includes 20-minute module, 'Implementing social prescribing in your practice,'	<a href="https://www.allianceon.org/Social-Prescribing-Online-Course">https://www.allianceon.org/Social-Prescribing-Online-Course</a>
Social Prescribing – Online Course, Preview Video ( 1 min 17 s)	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W23fQVreLBs">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W23fQVreLBs</a>
In-person Professional Learning Event (PLE) for Social Prescribing and Health Promotion – September 26	<a href="https://www.allianceon.org/event/Alliance-Social-Prescribing-and-Health-Promotion-Professional-Learning-Event">https://www.allianceon.org/event/Alliance-Social-Prescribing-and-Health-Promotion-Professional-Learning-Event</a>
Black Focused Social Prescribing	<a href="https://www.allianceon.org/files/inline-files/BFSP_Report_-_Final_-_WEB.pdf">https://www.allianceon.org/files/inline-files/BFSP_Report_-_Final_-_WEB.pdf</a>
Links2Wellbeing: Social Prescribing for Older Adults	<a href="https://www.allianceon.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/LINKS2WELLBEING_REPORT_Final.pdf">https://www.allianceon.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/LINKS2WELLBEING_REPORT_Final.pdf</a>
Social Prescribing Link Workers Work	<a href="https://www.allianceon.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/Social_Prescribing_Link_Workers_Work_FINAL.pdf">https://www.allianceon.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/Social_Prescribing_Link_Workers_Work_FINAL.pdf</a>
Video: TAIBU Community Health Centre in Scarborough	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zSiQd1DEks">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zSiQd1DEks</a>
Video: Seaway Valley Community Health Centre in Cornwall	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1zB-LdPzAk&amp;t=1s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1zB-LdPzAk&amp;t=1s</a>
Video: Lakeshore Nurse Practitioner-led Clinic in Belle River	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jRJWGhoujw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jRJWGhoujw</a>

# Resources Education



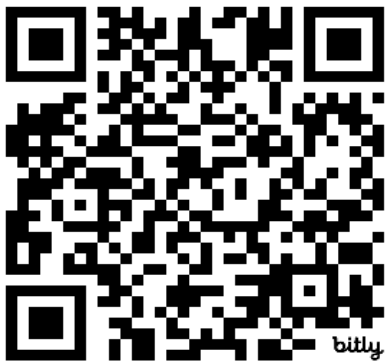
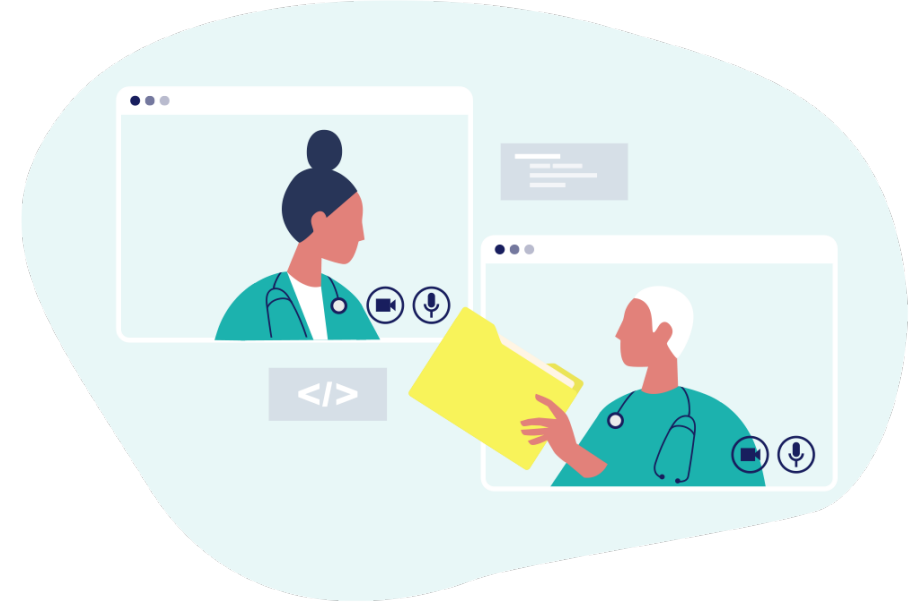
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# Mentorship Program - Connect with a Peer Guide!

Connect with another family physician in OCFP's **one-to-one mentorship program** for educational support in **achieving your learning goals**.

**Examples of topics Peer Learners have explored with Peer Guides:**

- Guidance for early career/work-life balance
- ADHD and approach to management
- Opioid agonist therapies



**Scan the QR  
code for more  
information!**



[Peer Connect](#)



[practisingwell@ocfp.on.ca](mailto:practisingwell@ocfp.on.ca)



# Upcoming Community of Practice

## Tips and Tricks for Addressing Burnout with Drs. Anish Mody, Neil Naik, Samantha Lavitt

**September 17, 2025**  
**8:00am – 9:00am**

[Register Now](#)

[practisingwell@ocfp.on.ca](mailto:practisingwell@ocfp.on.ca)



This one-credit-per-hour Group Learning program has been certified by the College of Family Physicians of Canada and the Ontario Chapter for up to 1 Mainpro+ credit. The Practising Well Community of Practice includes a series of planned live, interactive sessions. Each session is worth 1 Mainpro+ credits, for up to a total of 12 credits.