siren
Social Interventions Research & Evaluation Network

SIREN 2019 Research Grants
Improving Patient Interest in Social Risks Screening and Assistance Interventions

Background

The Social Interventions Research and Evaluation Network (SIREN) was established in 2016 to conduct, catalyze, and disseminate high quality research that advances health care sector strategies to improve social conditions. Under a 2017 Innovations Grants program funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and Kaiser Permanente (KP), SIREN supported two research projects focused on evaluating the financial return on investment of health system-based social care interventions. Again with the support of RWJF and KP, we are excited to announce a new call for research proposals specifically focused on exploring patient interest in social care services provided by health care delivery settings.

Grants Program Description

Over the last decade, health care practices have increasingly adopted social risk screening and social services assistance programs, fueled both by strong research linking social conditions with health outcomes and the spread of value-based payment models that reward health over health services. These programs typically involve screening for social risks such as food insecurity, housing instability, and lack of transportation, followed by referrals and/or navigation to programs that can help address identified needs. Referrals may link patients with off-site programs such as food pantries or housing assistance programs, though in some settings they refer to onsite assistance programs, such as Medical-Legal Partnerships or clinic-based food pantries. A consistent pattern has emerged as these programs are tested in new settings: typically fewer than half of those who screen positive for social risk factors are interested in receiving assistance from the health system to help address identified risks (see references at the end of the document).

Little research has been published to date examining the reasons why patients and families who screen positive decline health care-based assistance, the characteristics of those declining assistance, and how to design screening and assistance programs to maximize interest in assistance. To address these gaps in knowledge, SIREN is seeking proposals for research studies that help advance either of the following two research topics:

- **Topic 1:** Understanding patient interest in social care assistance offered by health care organizations. Under this topic, proposed projects could analyze existing data from social risk screening and assistance programs or undertake new data collection to identify patient, provider, clinic, organization, community or other factors associated with patient interest (or disinterest) in assistance. Projects could also interview patients to understand why and in what cases they might be interested in assistance.

- **Topic 2:** Identifying social risk screening and assistance strategies that can increase patient interest in health care-based assistance. Under this topic, proposals should compare the impacts of different screening and assistance approaches on patient uptake of assistance. For

example, studies could compare different staffing models, workflows, scripts to introduce screening and assistance programs, or other program modifications that may increase uptake.

For the purposes of this Call for Proposals (CFP), social risks are defined as non-medical social and economic risks that influence health outcomes. Examples include but are not limited to financial, food, or housing insecurity; transportation needs; employment barriers; poor housing conditions; or lack of personal safety. Mental health needs and unhealthy behaviors (e.g., smoking, drug or alcohol use, unhealthy diet, lack of physical exercise) are not considered social risks under this CFP. Social assistance services include both linkage or navigation programs that connect patients to off-site community-based services as well as programs that provide direct, on-site assistance. Screening and assistance services can focus on addressing a single need or multiple needs. All projects must be focused on social risks and needs screening and assistance programs that are offered by or originate in health care organizations (e.g., clinics, hospitals, insurance providers, etc.).

Grant Amounts and Time Periods

- **Research Topic 1:** Total budget not to exceed $50,000 per project; project period up to 12 months.
- **Research Topic 2:** Total budget not to exceed $150,000 per project; project period up to 24 months.

Total budget limits include both direct and indirect costs with a maximum indirect rate of 12%. Applicants may apply under both categories although two proposals from the same applicant team are unlikely to be funded.

A total of $500,000 is available for this funding opportunity. The number of grants made will depend on the number of proposals and and requested funds. Due to the relatively limited funding levels, we encourage applications that leverage existing screening and assistance programs.

Applicant Eligibility

Both nonprofit and for-profit organizations are eligible to apply for this grant opportunity although preference will be given to applicant organizations that are institutions of higher education, public entities, or nonprofit organizations that are tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Applicant organizations must be based in the United States or its territories.

Recognizing that diverse perspectives strengthen research, we encourage submissions from applicants belonging to groups that are underrepresented in health research as defined by the National Institutes of Health. This includes applicants from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, individuals with disabilities, and individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds (see the end of this document for a definition).

Review Criteria

Proposals will be reviewed by UCSF-based and external reviewers using the following criteria:

- Relevance: Focus of the proposed project on at least one of the research topics outlined above.

- Significance: Ability of the research project to help substantively advance one of the research goals outlined above.

- Rigor of the proposed study methods to adequately answer the question. SIREN defines rigorous studies as those that:

    o Have a well-defined research question (or questions);

    o Have a sample size large enough to detect effects of programmatic and/or clinical significance;

    o Use validated measures and instruments and appropriate analytic methods; and

    o For intervention evaluations: Employ a well-matched comparison group so that impacts can reasonably be attributed to the intervention. We will consider study designs that do not include matched controls in cases where other factors help to ensure that any observed differences can be attributed to the intervention. For example, rapid cycle learning/quality improvement techniques would be eligible under this CFP if they are conducted with large enough sample sizes and in an environment where other relevant variables remain constant.

    Note: We encourage the use of qualitative methods for both research goals.

- Generalizability: Potential for applicability of results to other geographies, patient populations, and/or healthcare settings.

- Qualifications of the study team to effectively carry out the proposed research project. In addition to ensuring applicants have the requisite technical qualifications, preference will be given to project teams that include individuals from groups that are underrepresented in health research, as defined above.

- Engagement of patient, clinic, and/or community stakeholders as part of the research process. Proposals should describe and justify which stakeholders will be involved, how they will be recruited, and their planned level of engagement (consultation, involvement, collaboration, etc.). Preference will be given to proposals that engage patients in the design and interpretation of research.[1]

- Feasibility of accomplishing the proposed research project, including whether all relevant stakeholders have expressed support for the project and whether the budget and timelines are appropriate to the project scope.

Grant Requirements

In addition to carrying out the proposed research, grantees will be required to present their research project on a Works-In-Progress webinar with SIREN's Research Advisory Committee early in the grant period and a public SIREN webinar after completion of the project. Grantees will

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[1] PCORI's Engagement Rubric offers guidelines that can facilitate patient engagement in research: https://www.pcori.org/sites/default/files/Engagement-Rubric.pdf

also need to provide annual reports and participate in annual calls to describe project progress and funds usage.

Application Process
Interested applicants are asked to signal their intent to apply through this form by **September 16 at 5:00pm Pacific Time (PT).** This indication of intent is non-binding and will be used to plan the review process.

Proposals should be submitted by **September 30, 2019 at 5:00pm PT** and include the following elements:
1. Proposal narrative describing the research question(s) and research plan, including any stakeholder engagement (maximum 6 pages).
2. Research team qualifications
3. Budget
4. Budget justification
5. Letters of support (if applicable)

Applicants should use the templates available here. A link to the proposal submission form will be provided to applicants once the intent to apply form has been submitted.

Decisions on full proposals are expected to be made by November 15, 2019 and projects should begin no later than January 1, 2020.

Questions?
Please review the Frequently Asked Questions. If you have additional questions, please contact us at siren@ucsf.edu. We will also hold a zoom office hour on August 8, 2019 at 11am PT/2pm ET.

Technical Assistance and Researcher Matching
For interested organizations with questions about study design, we can provide one hour of telephone consultation prior to application submission to discuss proposed research projects. We also may be able to help identify research partners for those interested in submitting a proposal but lacking research capacity. Please write to siren@ucsf.edu prior to August 30, 2019 if you are interested in consultation or researcher matching. Note that receipt of technical consultation will not confer preferential treatment during the proposal review process.

Definition of Underrepresented in Research:
Based on this NIH notice, individuals who are underrepresented in research include:

A. Individuals from the following racial and ethnic groups that have been shown by the National Science Foundation to be underrepresented in health-related sciences on a national basis, including Blacks or African Americans, Hispanics or Latinos, American Indians or Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders. In addition, it is recognized that underrepresentation can vary from setting to setting; individuals from racial or ethnic groups that can be demonstrated convincingly to be underrepresented by the grantee institution are encouraged to participate in this program.

B. Individuals with disabilities, who are defined as those with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, as described in the [Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended](#).

C. Individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, defined as:

1. Individuals who come from a family with an annual income below established low-income thresholds (see http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/index.shtml).

2. Individuals who come from an educational environment such as that found in certain rural or inner-city environments that has demonstrably and directly inhibited the individual from obtaining the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to develop and participate in a research career.

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