

Kaiser Permanente expanding care with partnerships

Network connects patients with social services to aid health

Kaiser Permanente has launched a community social health network with the goal of pairing health systems and health centers together to tackle social needs such as safe housing and good nutrition. (Alisha Jucevic/The Columbian)Buy this photo

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Kaiser Permanente has launched a new social health network to serve patients in a more comprehensive manner by connecting its health care professionals with social service agencies.

Thrive Local, the social health network, will address social health needs such as housing, food, safety, transportation and facilities, according to a Kaiser press release. Nicole Friedman, the national operations lead for Thrive Local, said this is a way for Kaiser to expand care.

“We need a reliable, consistent and standardized way to connect members to services in the community,” Friedman said. “The health care landscape, the ecosystem needs to change.”

A recent Kaiser survey discovered that Americans view social needs such as stable housing and reliable transportation as integral to their health care, even though those needs aren’t something that ordinarily could be addressed in a quick wellness doctor’s visit.

“We need to do things in the health care world differently, and we keep doing the same thing and then not making particular progress,” said Dave Kelly, the executive director for the Area Agency on Aging & Disabilities of Southwest Washington. Kelly and the agency will work with Kaiser as part of Thrive Local.

Kelly said networks such as Thrive Local will be essential to improving future health outcomes. He described a scenario in which a doctor is trying to help a diabetes patient improve their diet. The doctor and patient both recognize what needs to be improved, but sometimes that patient might not even know how to boil water to make healthier meals — a scenario agency case workers have encountered before, Kelly said.

Christina Marneris, the community services program supervisor for the agency, said this is where community partners, that have the resources and infrastructure in place, can help Kaiser.

“If someone is hungry, if someone can’t get to their doctor’s appointments, if someone needs help at home, chances are that’s going to influence their health outcomes,” Marneris said. “If you don’t address those, then the benefits of what’s going on in the medical world can’t be fully realized. So you’ve got to get those basic needs addressed.”

Beyond addressing the social needs of health, Thrive Local will utilize technology so health care workers have a directory of social service agencies and community organizations to which they can refer patients. The technology will also allow those health care workers to track how those referrals have gone, so they can see that a patient’s needs are being met.

“We have to partner with the community to be successful here,” Friedman said.