Connecting Social Care Data to Z Codes: Research Brief #3
Analysis by Age Range

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Understanding Z codes and the role of social care is key.

Z Codes were introduced with the International Classification of Disease, Tenth Revision, to identify socioeconomic and psychosocial circumstances and their impact on healthcare. However, a Centers for Medicare and Medicaid study reported that less than 2% of 2019 Medicare claims included at least one Z code. Healthcare providers can address the root causes of health disparities and work towards a more equitable healthcare system by using Z Codes to track social drivers of health and health-related social needs.

Social care is a new term in American healthcare that refers to supports and services provided to individuals or families to reduce the negative impact of social drivers of health. It differs from social work, which is a profession that promotes social change, cohesion, and the well-being of individuals. Social care focuses on linking people to resources that resolve a specific, non-medical need and helps them access community resources for better health and wellness. For instance, a community health worker who connects a family to a local food bank and assists in applying for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program to resolve food insecurity provides social care.

Beacon Community Connections is an innovative leader in providing social care.

Beacon Community Connections is a social care organization that addresses social determinants of health needs. Since 2018, Beacon has partnered with healthcare systems and organizations to identify social care needs and connect individuals and families to community resources. So far, Beacon has served over 7,000 individuals and

families, with a 91% success rate in resolving at least one social care need. Beacon's Navigation service has effectively reduced 30-day hospital readmission rates by 60% at participating hospitals and reduced 30-day Emergency Department revisits by up to 70%, depending on the facility. Beacon's Navigators, certified as community resource specialists and community health workers, work alongside standard healthcare services to provide support and assistance to individuals and families in need.

Beacon used crosswalk mapping analysis to link its social care need categories to Z codes for social drivers of health. Demographic data was collected on over 95% of clients. An analysis was completed on the 5,513 needs of clients with active cases between 2020 and 2022. Beacon is working to comply with CMS reporting requirements for social determinants of health and other accrediting bodies' standards and regulations on collecting, reporting, and using Z codes. The figures below illustrate an overview of the results.
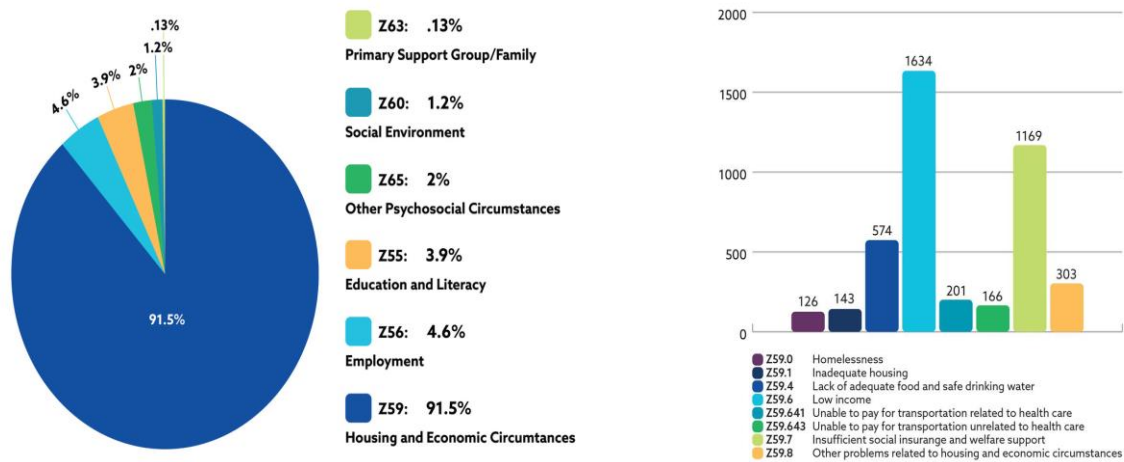
An analysis by age range revealed Z code similarities and differences among patients.
Beacon's crosswalk mapping analysis included an analysis by generational age categories. Five generational categories are reported here.
- Generation Z plus a younger, unnamed generation, ages 0 to 26 years, had 303 needs reported.
- Millennials, ages 27 to 42 years, had 1072 needs reported.
- Generation X, ages 43 to 58 years, had 1359 needs reported.
- Boomers, ages 59 to 77 years, had 1212 needs reported.
- Silent Generation and Greatest Generation, ages 78 and beyond, 130 needs reported.

Similar to the overall findings of the analysis, the same three Z codes were the most prevalent for each generational age group.

- Z 59.4, lack of adequate food (8-22% of needs)
- Z59.6, low income (22-38% of needs)
- Z59.7, insufficient social insurance and welfare support (23-29%)

This indicates a pervasive and potentially lifelong struggle with poverty among Beacon's clients. It also presents a picture of health systems' patients struggling with the direct and indirect effects of poverty.

Z Code	Gen Z+	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers	Silent+
Z55	1	0	0	0	0
Z55.8	3	6	1	2	0
Z56	37	87	43	20	0
Z56.89	0	0	0	1	0
Z59	3	1	5	3	0
Z59.0	9	35	41	26	1
Z59.1	4	15	35	75	6
Z59.4	25	118	182	176	28
Z59.6	116	388	501	414	28
Z59.641	4	29	50	88	17
Z59.643	7	33	44	52	8
Z59.7	79	288	390	296	30
Z59.8	0	35	24	20	0
Z59.89	1	6	6	7	0
Z60	6	9	2	14	10
Z60.3	1	0	0	1	0
Z63	2	2	0	1	0
Z65	0	1	0	0	0
Z65.3	5	19	33	14	2
Z65.5	0	0	2	2	0
Total	303	1072	1359	1212	130

Some differences among the generations are noted here.

- Younger generations struggle more with employment and unemployment. 12% of Generation Z+ clients identified this as a need which decreases across generations to 2% of Boomer needs and 0% of Silent Generation+ clients.
- Transportation issues are fairly low until the oldest generation. The Silent and Greatest Generations had 13% of its needs related to transportation (Z59.641 - transportation to medical appointments). The other transportation Z Code (Z59.641 - transportation to non-medical places) counted for 6% of social care needs.

- Social isolation and loneliness are most commonly reported among the oldest and youngest generations (Z60- problems related to social environment).
- While all generations struggled with a lack of access to safety net programs (Z59.7 insufficient social insurance or welfare support), the highest percentage was among Generation X, followed by Millennials. See the figure below for more details.
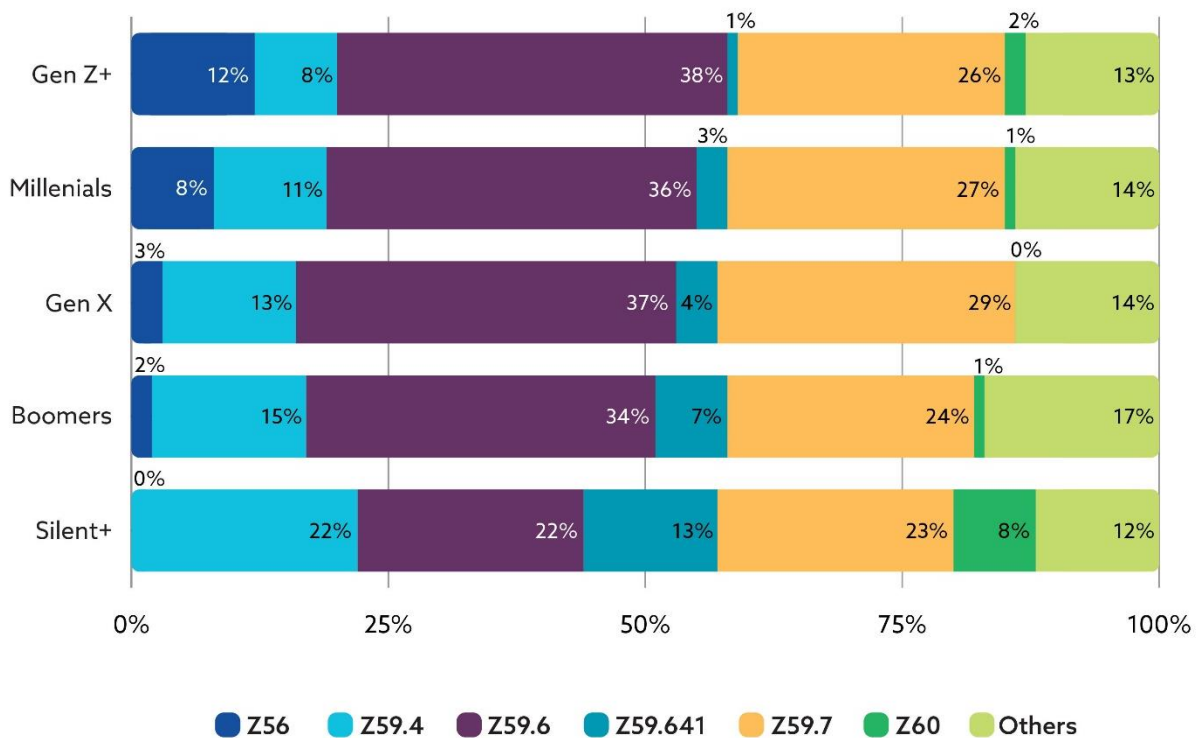
Z Codes are a critical tool in building healthcare and social care systems for positive patient outcomes for all ages and generations.

While analysis by generational age categories can be illuminating, the focus should remain at an individual level. Caution must be exercised to avoid assigning Z codes to patients because of their age. Beacon encourages healthcare professionals to use this information to talk more openly with patients about their potential health-related social needs. For example, ask all adult Generation Z patients about their employment status since a high number of Generation Z patients may experience challenges with employment (Z56).

Current healthcare applications of Z codes include identifying patients at risk for certain health outcomes due to their social circumstances. For example, a patient who lives in a house with mold may be at risk for chronic health conditions such as asthma. By using Z codes to identify these patients, healthcare providers can work with community-

based organizations like Beacon to address their specific needs and provide appropriate interventions. Z codes can also be used to track and monitor SDOH-related health outcomes. By including information about a patient's social circumstances in their health records, healthcare providers can track the impact of social care on their health outcomes over time. This information can be used to identify successful interventions in reducing health disparities.

As healthcare professionals and administrators increase their identification and response to health-related social needs through the use of Z codes, it will be imperative for health organizations to collaborate with community-based organizations to address social care needs. Collaboration can ensure that patients receive the care and support they need to live healthy, fulfilling lives. Through strong patient-focused partnerships, we can build a healthcare system that prioritizes social care and works towards a future where everyone can thrive.