H.R.6561, Improving Social Determinants of Health Act of 2020

**Issue:** COVID-19 fatalities are disproportionately high in the same communities that have high rates of kidney disease. The same underlying illnesses that cause end-stage renal disease (ESRD) in communities of color—diabetes and hypertension—also increase the mortality rate of COVID-19. There are correlations between non-medical factors and poorer health outcomes. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) call these elements social determinants of health (SDOH), and they are defined as “conditions in the environments in which people live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks.” Some studies have shown that medical care only accounts for about 10% to 20% of the modifiable contributors to healthy outcomes in a population. The association between a healthy community and access to nutritious food, safe housing, education, and good jobs is clear.

The CDC’s Healthy People 2020 initiative included a goal of creating “social and physical environments that promote good health for all.” The CDC has stated that community-wide, nonclinical aspects to public health show positive outcomes that improve the public health and decrease health care costs. However, the CDC and public health departments are not funded to provide cross-cutting work that includes these nonclinical interventions.

**Request:** Please co-sponsor H.R.6561, Improving Social Determinants of Health Act of 2020

H.R.6561, the *Improving Social Determinants of Health Act of 2020*, would create grants to study, address, and improve the social, economic, and environmental factors that make up public health. Specifically, it would create the Social Determinants of Health Program at the CDC which would:

- Coordinate across CDC to ensure programs consider and incorporate SDOH in grants and activities
- Award grants to state, local, territorial, and Tribal health agencies and organizations to address SDOHs in target communities
- Award grants to nonprofit organizations and institutions of higher education to conduct research on SDOH best practices; provide technical assistance, training and evaluation assistance to target community grantees; and disseminate best practices
- Coordinate, support, and align SDOH activities at CDC with other agencies, such as CMS and others
- Collect and analyze data related to SDOH activities

The legislation would create a pathway for improvements in communities that currently have higher rates of chronic illness by funding public health departments to work with other social services departments to improve access to safe housing, education, job training, and nutrition programs. Together, all these aspects of life can be improved and help slow the progression of kidney disease in minority communities, reducing the number of people who must go on dialysis.