



Beyond Medicine™

The Cost-saving Power of Addressing Social Drivers of Health

Author: Faith Tarver, MA, LMHC

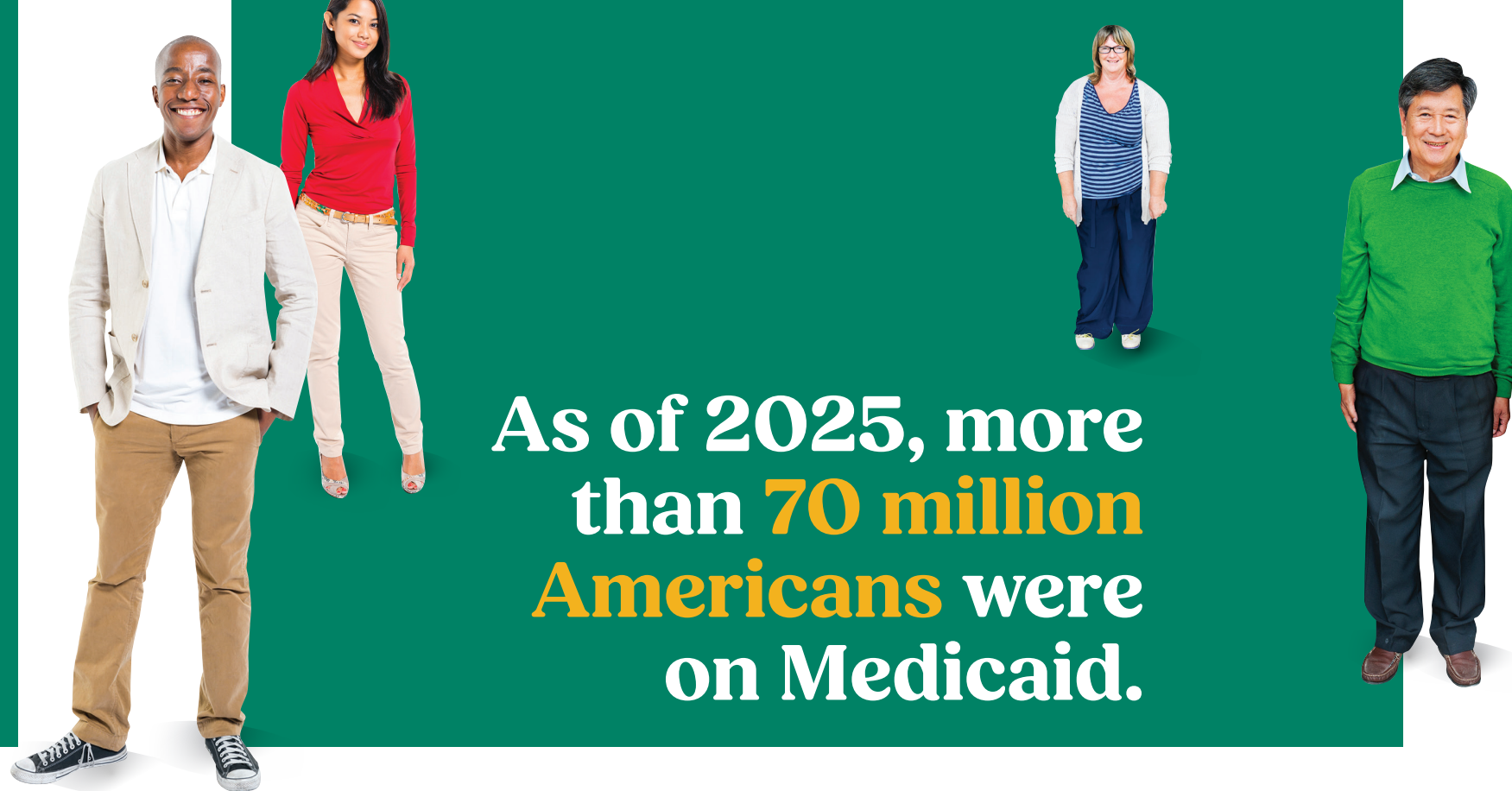
The Care Before Health Care: Addressing Social Barriers to Health

In our communities, residents experience unique barriers to living as healthy as possible. These disparities may include access to quality health care, education, employment, housing, transportation and more.¹ Research has demonstrated that zip code oftentimes plays a more significant role in health outcomes than “DNA code”².

For one person, a pair of shoes may be purchased on a whim and shoved into an overflowing closet. For another, a pair of shoes may be what is needed to avoid infections and prevent an emergency department visit. As providers of value-based care – focused on quality and health outcomes of the individual served – seeing and acting on these disparities is a necessity. To do this effectively requires a person-centered process to identify and provide the right resources at the right time to meaningfully impact an individual and is purpose-built into the care model. This includes employing team members dedicated to addressing social determinants of health so clinical teams can focus on medical needs.

¹ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11617406>

² <https://ncrc.org/your-zip-code-is-more-important-than-your-genetic-code>



As of 2025, more
than **70 million**
Americans were
on Medicaid.

Of that, a subset of individuals falls into ABD Medicaid which covers people who are 65 years and older, blind or disabled, and meet financial eligibility requirements. This group – typically about 23% of Medicaid members – represents over half of Medicaid expenditures³ and is the primary population served by AbsoluteCare.

At AbsoluteCare, more than

60 percent of members have a serious behavioral health diagnosis

28 percent have food insecurity

14 percent have unstable housing

13 percent experience illiteracy.⁴

Many of these people have had poor experiences with the health care system, resulting in skepticism in trusting health care providers. To impact the health outcomes of this population requires an investment in building trust by getting to know them and their needs. One way we build trust is by first addressing the non-medical barriers to care. This is part of our integrated whole-person approach demonstrating our Beyond Medicine™ care model.

This population is often referred to as complex, vulnerable or marginalized. The reality is that these are people who struggle to engage with our established system of health care. We've built a health care infrastructure overly reliant on the ability of the patient to access care by driving to appointments, having Internet and technology for virtual care, and having the ability to read or understand health information.

In reality, people can only make life and health care choices based on what is available to them. So, in the absence of fresh food, green space for exercise, health care, high-quality school systems, or jobs, healthy choices are limited. This is correlated to poor health outcomes as compared to counterparts residing in communities with more healthy options available. AbsoluteCare recognizes this and makes it a priority to offer access and support for our members who have historically had limited choices available to them, personalized to recognize their individual strengths and needs.

³ <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/issue-brief/10-things-to-know-about-medicaid>

⁴ AbsoluteCare internal data (2025)

Creating a Four-Step Program for Whole-Person Care

One key aspect of going Beyond Medicine is having a dedicated social team to address social drivers of health that's fully integrated into the whole-person care model. At AbsoluteCare, this is a four-step process:

Screen for Social Drivers of Health Needs

Our members are assessed for social determinants of health needs via a standardized questionnaire. The questions cover four key domains including economic stability, education, physical environment and food. Together with the member, these unique needs are identified and prioritized and an individual care plan is created that leverages the member's autonomy and strengths.

Step
1

Identify Appropriate Resources

Following a strength-based approach to addressing a member's needs, we first identify what the member can do for themselves, with the ultimate goal of setting them on a path toward long-term independence. For remaining needs, we see what resources are available in the community. Connecting members to community resources promotes both independence and a sense of integration within the community. Next, we review what services are covered by their health plan. Finally, we identify remaining service needs that we can support through the AbsoluteCare Member Fund. These may be one-time funds or ongoing depending on the individual need.

The identification of community resources is critical as many of AbsoluteCare's members can be connected to services through existing community-based organizations, many of which have deep roots and knowledge into the needs of the local communities, such as local:

- Food Pantries
- Housing Authority Vouchers
- Salvation Army Clothes and Furniture
- LIHEAP Utility Support
- Transportation Services
- YMCAs
- FindHelp.com

Step
2



The AbsoluteCare Member Fund: Addressing Critical Life Needs

One of our most impactful strategies for addressing immediate social drivers of health is the AbsoluteCare Member Fund. This is a self-funded account established in each AbsoluteCare market to support members when community-based resources aren't directly or readily available.

The member's social needs are identified based on the assessment and recommendation of the Integrated Care Team (ICT). These are services and needs that the care team correlates to a risk of poor health outcomes if the need is not met and improved health outcomes when the need is met. This includes critical needs like transportation, financial assistance to support stable housing, home goods to maintain health, utility bills that keep electricity on, food and nutrition, durable medical equipment (DME), incontinence supplies and much more.

Step 3

Ensure Receipt of Resource

AbsoluteCare doesn't just identify that a member needs food and provide a list of food pantries. While that can be a first step to resolving a need, there may be minimal to no true impact if the member doesn't act on it. It's like the communication fallacy, "I said it, so they heard it."

At AbsoluteCare, we have dedicated resource specialists, social determinants of health coordinators, community health workers and complex case managers who provide high-touch care to ensure members actually access and receive the services. This may take the form of a follow-up call to confirm the member went to the food pantry, sitting side-by-side helping the member complete and submit a SNAP application or going together with them to the food pantry for the first time and walking alongside them so they can see where it's located and how it works.

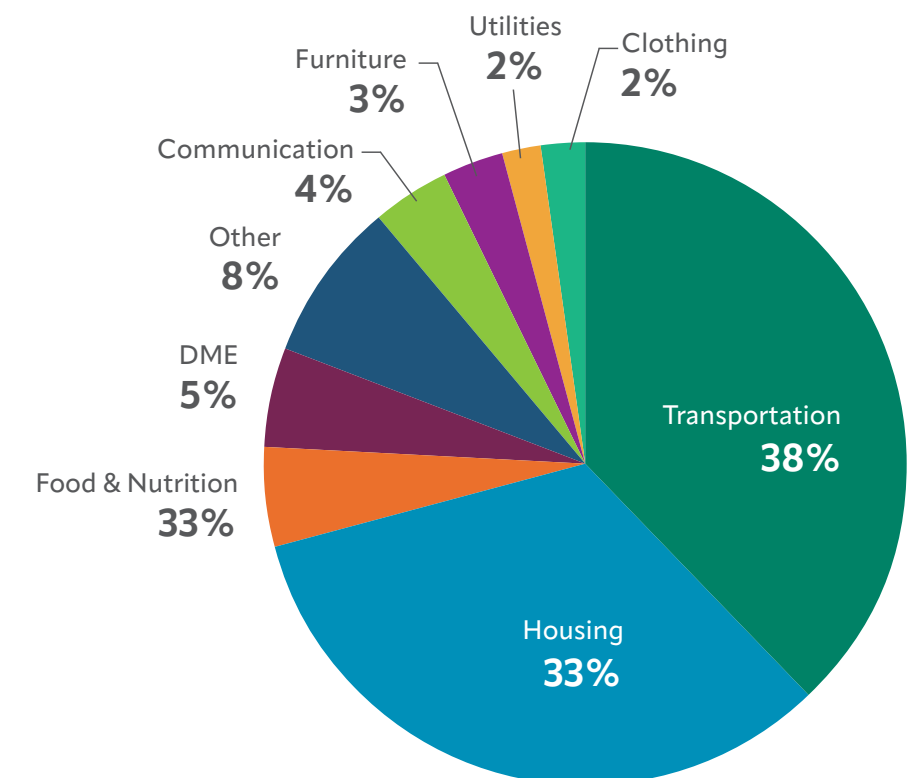
Step 4

Establish a Path to Sustainability

While individuals may need immediate support, the long-term goal is to empower them to take control of their own health and wellbeing. Establishing a path to sustainability is critical so that the member isn't reliant on one provider or company to keep them well. This long-term approach can be divided into three segments:

- 1. Immediate stop-gap support needed today**
 - Food unstable = Provide a food box from items kept on-site
- 2. Empower member to participate** in care through education and supporting autonomy
 - Show how to complete SNAP forms and enrollment into local food bank; accompany to food bank as needed.
- 3. Transition ownership to member**
 - Member goes to food bank as needed for self and family independently.

Percentage of Member Fund Investment in Resources (2022-2024)⁵



⁵ AbsoluteCare internal data (2025)



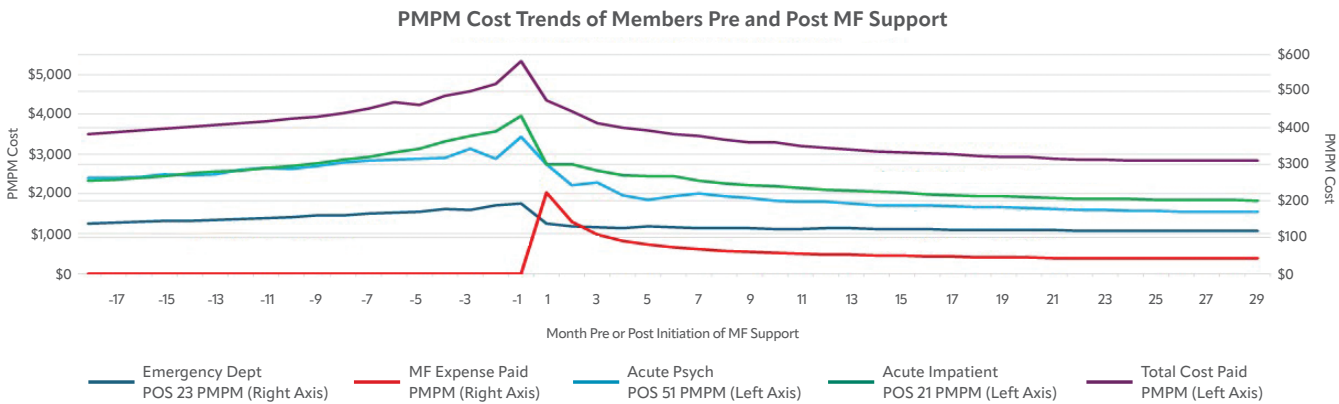
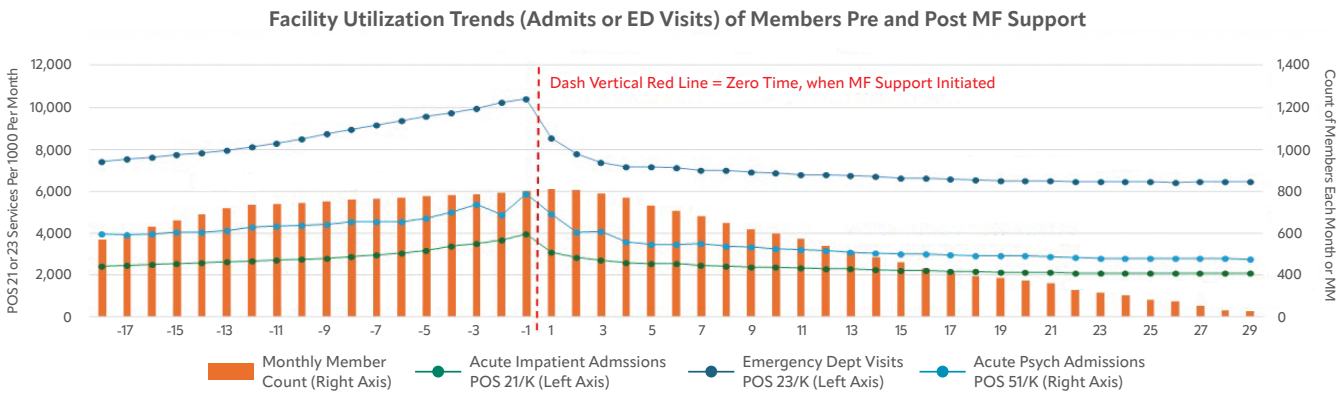
Transformative Impact of Member Fund Investments: Driving Improved Care Outcomes and Cost Savings

AbsoluteCare completed an analysis of the Member Fund for years 2022 through 2024. Within that timeframe, we documented 2,753 instances of Member Fund assistance provided to 762 members. This is in addition to the thousands of members who received support through AbsoluteCare’s ability to connect them to community resources.

The results showed that every **\$1 invested from the Member Fund generated a cost savings of \$13**, primarily driven by reduced unnecessary health care utilization, representing a 16% reduction in monthly total cost of care.

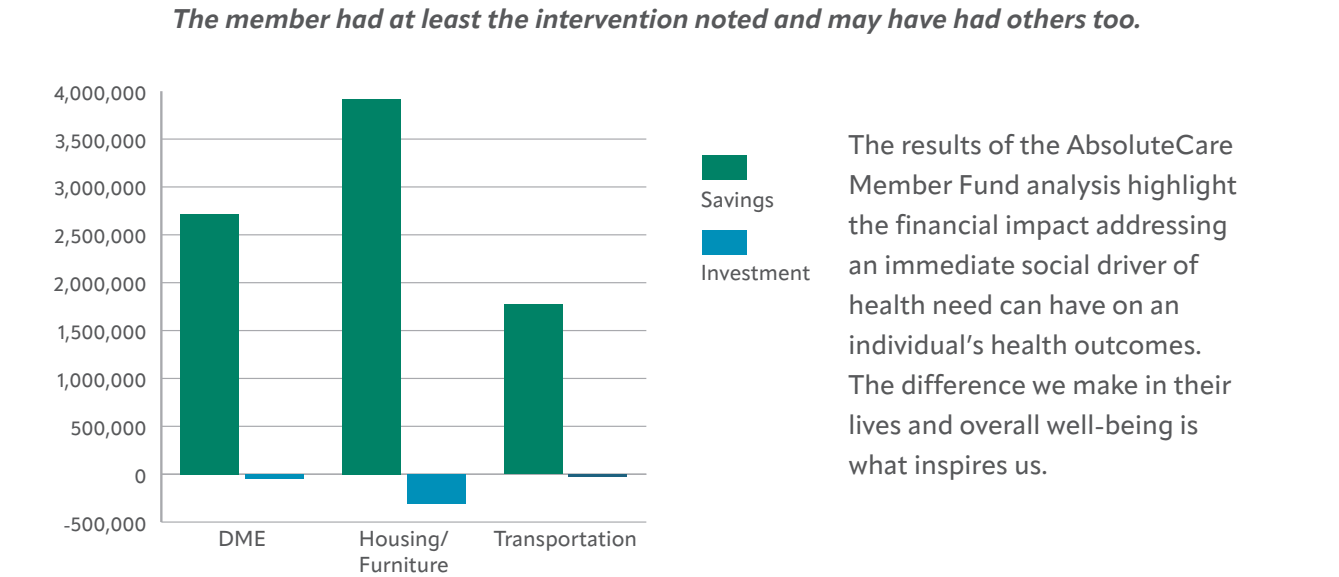
This analysis was done by comparing these members’ monthly health care costs pre- and post-intervention. Intervention is defined as the service or item provided to the member that was funded through the Member Fund.

Social Interventions Associated with Decreased Utilization



The interventions that drove the most value were durable medical equipment (DME) assistance, housing/ furniture assistance and transportation assistance. Some interventions, such as food/nutrition assistance, are more accessible through community resources so didn’t appear to result in as much direct impact based on the requirement of the study that the service was paid for through the Member Fund.

Savings to Investment for 3 Top Interventions





From Crisis to Stability: A Member's Journey of Resilience Through Whole-Person Care

After joining AbsoluteCare in December 2021, our member – “James” – faced a harsh reality shaped by homelessness and the accompanying social drivers of health that significantly impacted his well-being. James’ experience with homelessness began in 2003 after tragically losing his wife at a Philadelphia hospital. The emotional weight of this loss continued to affect him, as he frequently revisited the hospital where he had last seen her, seeking solace. In a single year, he admitted to the emergency room over 300 times, highlighting the impact of unstable housing and behavioral health needs.

Despite being presented with housing options over the years, including shelters and boarding

houses, James exercised his autonomy and declined these options. So his care team continued to look for solutions.

Recognizing the profound impact of housing instability on his health, AbsoluteCare’s Resource Specialist, James and his care team, agreed on an interim solution: temporary housing at a local hotel. This allowed James the security he needed to focus on permanent housing solutions and better manage his health conditions. Subsequently, this reduced his frequency of going to the emergency room.

During this time, AbsoluteCare continued building relationships with both temporary and permanent

housing partners in the community. This resulted in establishing a relationship with the hotel for temporary housing for James and other AbsoluteCare members facing housing barriers. Additionally, we identified a local equitable real estate development company that focuses on providing inclusionary housing. Through joint meetings between AbsoluteCare’s local and national leadership teams and the founder and CEO of the group, we created a working relationship that offered a permanent housing option for James to consider and ultimately accept.

James became medically engaged, reduced his use of the ED, and began accessing additional resources offered at AbsoluteCare when he came for his medical and behavioral health appointments. During his visits, he was offered direct access to items in the Member Closet including clothing and hygiene essentials. Once his housing stabilized, he was better able to focus on improving his health. As James became increasingly engaged and empowered in his health care, he decided to accept his first long-acting injectable in March 2025, a best practice in medication for his mental health care, after years of refusing mental health medication. James’ success could only be fully realized through AbsoluteCare’s Beyond Medicine approach to whole-person care.

With support of the Member Fund, team members dedicated to identifying and establishing innovative partnerships with community-based organizations, and an integrated care team that builds trust and wraps person-centered care around each member, AbsoluteCare continues to dismantle barriers caused by social drivers of health and improve the health for thousands of our most vulnerable neighbors.

The Transformative Power of Integrated, Whole-Person Care

When a member engages with AbsoluteCare for social support, we make sure they understand that we want to know about what they prioritize in life first, so they know that we will meet them where they are in their health care journey. This builds trust, making it more likely for them to engage with us for all of their health care needs. AbsoluteCare’s unique ability to provide services that meet physical, behavioral, and social needs like primary care, behavioral health care, food, pharmacy, and walk-in care all in one place is life changing. This comprehensive, integrated approach to whole-person health creates an experience that establishes trust, destigmatizes care and creates a path to meaningful health outcomes for marginalized populations.

AbsoluteCare offers health services tailored to the most vulnerable members of society using a risk-bearing, PCP-driven care model. We treat the most clinically complex members of the communities we serve, many of whom face behavioral health, substance use, and social challenges. We tend exclusively to the needs of the high-risk population who persistently represent a disproportionate amount of unnecessary utilization and cost. Because of our innovative value-based arrangements, we provide individualized services for members who choose to enroll with us as their PCP as well as supplement services for those who remain engaged with other PCPs.

We deliver this care in our comprehensive care centers and in the communities we serve. In over 25 years, AbsoluteCare has achieved unprecedented outcomes by addressing medical and psychosocial issues and life's hardships that exacerbate chronic health conditions and complicate access to care. AbsoluteCare is headquartered in Columbia, Maryland, and currently operates in eleven markets: Chicago, IL; New Orleans, LA; Baltimore and Prince George's County, MD; Akron, Dayton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Ohio; and Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, PA. We have treated tens of thousands of chronically ill individuals, living up to the mission of providing care that goes Beyond Medicine™.

Sources:

¹ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11617406/>

² <https://ncrc.org/your-zip-code-is-more-important-than-your-genetic-code/>

³ <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/issue-brief/10-things-to-know-about-medicaid/>

^{4,5} AbsoluteCare internal data (2025)



For more information, visit www.absolutecare.com.