



**SIU MEDICINE**  
POPULATION SCIENCE  
& POLICY

# A Vision to Improve Health Outcomes in Central and Southern Illinois

Understanding challenges and providing  
innovative, sustainable solutions to improve  
health in rural and underserved communities





## At the forefront of a vital and growing field

Established in 2018, Southern Illinois University (SIU) School of Medicine Department of Population Science and Policy is taking a new approach to health care that combines **DATA ANALYSIS**, **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**, and **POLICY FORMATION** to address the social and structural factors that most influence health. We are one of the nation's first population health-focused academic medical departments and remain one of only a handful focused primarily on underserved and rural communities.

### KEY CAPABILITIES

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**Expertise.** Our deep knowledge, particularly in rural matters, has been recognized and sought out by local, state, and national institutions.

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**Engagement.** We leverage our strong partnerships with stakeholders and organizations in the communities we serve to create collaborations, maximize resources, and eliminate barriers.

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**Innovation.** We work with communities to help design frameworks, develop capacity, and organize resources to spark, nurture, and replicate homegrown innovation.

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**Policy Influence.** We provide a nonpartisan, evidence-based perspective that is informed by our on-the-ground knowledge of community needs and the resources required to improve health outcomes and equity.

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**Multidisciplinary Perspective.** Our team is trained in medicine, law, public health, social work, policy, and business, which gives us a 360-degree approach to developing and helping implement effective and sustainable solutions.

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## Divisions

### **Epidemiology & Biostatistics**

Serves as a traditional academic research arm working to gather and analyze data and share findings.

### **Health System Science**

Uses evidenced-based research to inform and improve local, state, and national policies that affect the health of rural and underserved populations.

### **Human & Community Development**

Works with communities to identify, design, and implement effective solutions to improve health through mixed methods research.

### **Education**

Collaborates across divisions to develop and teach a population health curriculum to medical students and resident trainees.

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## Impact areas

The diagram consists of two overlapping light purple circles. The left circle is labeled 'Health Equity' and the right circle is labeled 'Mental and Behavioral Health'. A vertical line extends from the intersection of the two circles down to the text 'Systems of Care'.

### **Health Equity**

Our project design addresses the social and structural determinants of health that influence whether someone is starting from an equal (or unequal) playing field.

### **Mental and Behavioral Health**

We collaborate with communities to identify the external factors that contribute to poor mental and behavioral health outcomes and give leaders strategies and blueprints to address them.

### **Systems of Care**

A greater system of care emerges when equity, mental health, and the social determinants of health are considered by hospitals, health care, social service providers, and community leaders. We use a multidisciplinary approach to build and coordinate meaningful systems that meet the distinct and changing needs of communities.

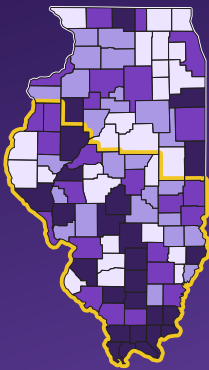
# Our approach impacts the communities that need it most.

The Department of Population Science and Policy was founded to extend SIU School of Medicine's social mission. Our service area covers 66 counties, nearly 32,000 square miles, and 2.2 million people. Communities vary in size, shape, and demographics. For every medium-sized Springfield and Decatur, there is a tiny Junction or Beecher City.

However, despite its great people and innovation, our region is in need. **Of the 25 Illinois counties at the highest risk of poor health outcomes, 22 are in the areas we serve.** Rural Illinois, in particular, is in need of sustained, sweeping change to improve the social, economic and environmental factors that determine health.

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## Health Factor Rankings by Illinois County, 2021



An estimate of the future health of Illinois counties based on health behaviors, clinical care, social and economic, and physical environment factors.

Source: *County Health Rankings and Roadmaps* ([countyhealthrankings.org](http://countyhealthrankings.org))

- Top quartile (1st–25th)
- Second quartile (26th–50th)
- Third quartile (51st–75th)
- Bottom quartile (76th–100th)
- SIU Medicine service area