The Minnesota Complexity Assessment Method (MCAM) checklist that accompanies this page is focused on what is known variably as “care complexity”, “non-medical complexity”, or “social complexity”, not on diseases or co-morbidities. (Peek, Baird, & Coleman, 2009)

One way to think of general usage of the term “patient complexity” is in two dimensions or axes:

- A **disease axis** (medical complexity) in which you count up the diseases, how many, how severe, and how they make each other worse.
- A **social/care delivery axis** (social or care complexity) that flags the non-disease factors that are known to interfere with usual care and decision-making for whatever conditions the patient has.

Two Axes of Patient Complexity

**Disease axis**: (ADG or other)
- Medical complexity:
  - How many diseases
  - How chronic
  - How severe
  - How challenging to manage
  - How challenging are their interactions.

**Social / care delivery axis**: (MCAM)
- Non-medical complexity—Domains:
  - **Illness**—levels of impairment and diagnostic uncertainty
  - **Readiness**—distress, distraction and readiness to engage
  - **Social**—social safety, support, and participation
  - **Health system**—organization of care and relationships
  - **Resources for care**—Common language, adequate insurance

The MCAM is for the “social/care axis”, intended to complement assessment for diagnosis and medical complexity.

- Most “complexity” tools de-emphasize the social complexity and end up being disease scales.
- We want to highlight the social or care complexity axis for which clinicians and medical educators usually have a very limited vocabulary or system of thinking and action.
- MCAM is based on foundational work in the Netherlands (de Jonge, Huyse & Stiefel, 2006) which takes this approach

In actual practice, MCAM has been used as a complement to some kind of disease-oriented checklist or assessment—which clinics typically already have on paper or in their EMR. But the idea comes up repeatedly to combine a disease-oriented checklist with the MCAM social-oriented checklist in one place—and to combine in such a way that it fits well the workflow in a given practice.
