

Transforming Policies for Health and Wellness

The US provides excellent medical treatment. However, health outcomes like life expectancy, chronic disease rates, and unhealthy days are not good. The cause is when people live in unhealthy environments or lack basic needs. We like to think that anyone can have the opportunity to thrive if they work hard enough, but in reality there are not enough good neighborhoods, schools, or jobs to go around. When people are not healthy, they are not able to be productive at work, in school, at home, and in their community.

Major improvements in health outcomes will need to come from new ways of thinking about our communities. Our views of the world shape the way that government policies are made and businesses operate. They underlie the critical investments and rules that determine who has access to environments that support health. Those environments – physical, natural, economic, and social – become the influences that affect human behaviors and exposure to hazards, and thus limit their health outcomes. How do we reframe our work to align our objectives around the total effect on people?



As we begin to see the root causes of health in a different light, we can start to work differently to address them. Health-focused spending has traditionally been concentrated in health care services and information. Public health innovation starts to invest more heavily in the root causes. Building on a foundation of shared accountability for the health of all communities and individuals, we can promote health, safety, and wellness at each level of the tree, from the roots to the leaves.

Growing a Healthy Society

There are as many potential strategies as there are communities and needs. Over time, investments in healthier communities should start to prevent disease and reduce the demand for other programs and services; these savings become reinvested to improve overall prosperity and quality of life, and reduce healthcare costs. The following principles will help guide communities to find the right solutions:

- **Adopt a Health in All Policies approach.** Health in All Policies is an innovative, collaborative, systematic approach to work across sectors, in order to identify public and private policies that can restore equitable and healthful living conditions, in alignment with trans-sectoral goals. Using this approach, it is possible to support the objectives of housing, transportation, education, planning, or other policies, while simultaneously promoting health, reducing health inequities, increasing resilience, reducing healthcare costs, improving quality of life, and supporting economic prosperity.
- **Align across sectors.** Many different agencies and organizations need to work together, including healthcare provider and payors, public health agencies, social service providers, schools and childcare providers, developers, community planners, and investors and other funders. Use a collective impact approach to work together.
- **Engage community members and other stakeholders.** Transform mindsets and distribution of power by engaging communities in decisions that affect them. Good community engagement transfers knowledge both ways – gathering information for policy decisions, and increasing community capacity to understand and influence them.
- **Focus on underlying inequities and opportunities.** Strategies that reduce inequities in influence, access, or economic opportunity will typically produce larger, longer-term gains than strategies that simply react to or mitigate the resulting resource and health disparities. Measure inequities and intentionally reduce them.
- **Evaluate results over communities and decades.** Quick results are appealing, but changing the root causes of health can take years or even a generation, and the transformation will be spread throughout the entire community.

“Public Health 3.0 is a major upgrade in public health practice to emphasize cross-sectoral environmental, policy, and systems-level actions that directly affect the social determinants of health and advance health equity. It represents a challenge to business leaders, community leaders, state lawmakers, and federal policymakers to incorporate health into all areas of governance.”

-HealthyPeople.gov

Get started! Contact the Georgia Health Policy Center Health in All Policies team for guides, workshops, partnership opportunities, and more.