

Align and Invest for Impact with Our Communities

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A black baby born in Delaware is nearly three times more likely to die in the first year of life compared to a white baby born in our state. An individual who lives in a predominantly black community in certain areas of Wilmington has an average life expectancy of 16 years less than someone who lives in nearby Greenville. These and other similar facts are heartbreaking, unjust, avoidable, and unacceptable.

Delaware is not a healthy state. The 2018 American's Health Rankings[®] by the United Health Foundation placed Delaware 31st among states, and in the bottom third of states for overdose deaths, infant mortality, cancer deaths, diabetes, physical activity, smoking, and cardiovascular death. Moreover, a plethora of health inequities tied to racial inequality exist in our state. For instance, infant mortality, an important indicator of community health, impacts Delaware's black women at a rate that is approximately 2.7 times higher than that of white women in our state. Life expectancy is three years lower for black Delawareans. Forty-six percent of Delawareans living with HIV/AIDS are black, despite the fact that blacks account for 21 percent of the state's population. The homicide rate for black men increased 116 percent between 2012 and 2016, a rate that is seven times higher than for white men.

Race matters. Geography matters, too. Key health outcomes and indicators like infant mortality, life expectancy, educational attainment, and child poverty vary across our Delaware communities. Where a person lives impacts the quality and affordability of their housing, their access to healthy foods, whether they'll obtain a decent, quality education and a livable wage, the likelihood that they'll be a crime victim, the probability of being diagnosed with one or more serious physical or mental health conditions, and their longevity. Poverty, unemployment, homelessness, recidivism, discrimination, language disparities, and violence rates all differ across our communities and are all associated with higher rates of chronic disease, disability and mortality.

More and more, we understand that a variety of social determinants are critical factors for health. Every person should have an equal opportunity to be healthy, regardless of their race and home address. To achieve optimal health, individuals and families need safe housing, livable wages, access to quality education, access to healthy foods, opportunities to be physically active, and safer neighborhoods. It has become clear that addressing health inequities by intentionally focusing on these social determinants of health in our disparate communities is critical.

A variety of community efforts have been in play, but too often we work in silos across the social determinants of health rather than working with communities to strategically align efforts. There are many important initiatives underway throughout our state and opportunities that can help address the social determinants of health. These efforts must be aligned in meaningful ways to maximize resources and leverage efforts to improve outcomes. Lack of sustainable funding has been the biggest barrier to long-term progress. Grants and projects – even the best ones –

come and go, sometimes with unintended consequences such as communities not trusting those who want to assist and lack of impact due to short-term investments. Sustained investments, infrastructure and technical support is sorely needed.

Healthy Communities Delaware (HCD) is a collaborative place-based approach to address social determinants of health and make a significant and sustainable impact on health by working in new ways with communities, organizations and other funders. The motto of Healthy Communities of Delaware is “Alignment, Investment, Impact.” HCD aims to assist communities with the greatest need for addressing health equity. This statewide initiative leverages resources from a variety of investors, including those in the banking, community development and health system arena. HCD supports and builds upon a variety of existing community-based planning initiatives, councils, and coalitions. HCD offers an infrastructure that encourages, enables and supports community capacity building and provides technical assistance for alignment, implementation, measurement and investment to address the most important social determinants of health as determined by the communities.

HCD, an outgrowth of the State Innovation Model (SIM) grant work, is a consortium of public, non-profit, and private organizations aiming to improve the health and well-being of our low-wealth communities. Created in 2018, HCD consists of a diverse 35-member Leadership Council, a Management Group, which is the administrative entity that manages the day-to-day operations of HCD, and a Community Investment Council (CIC). The Management Group is led by the Division of Public Health, the University of Delaware, and the Delaware Community Foundation. Investors represent state and local government; hospital systems; universities; major foundations; charity organizations; major banks; corporations; housing and community development financial institutions that deliver responsible, affordable lending to low-income and other disadvantaged groups.

The HCD Leadership Council has adopted the following Guiding Principles from Build Healthy Places¹:

- Collaborate with the Community
- Embed Equity
- Mobilize Across Sectors
- Increase Prosperity to Improve Health
- Commit Over the Long Term

We have heard loud and clear that to be successful, the communities must be in the driver’s seat. Communities need to be empowered and supported to lead the changes in order to truly make a meaningful difference. Communities will develop comprehensive portfolios involving multifaceted efforts and multiple investors. We know that communities are in different places regarding their ability to lead and support these efforts, HCD will work with them in building their capacity to plan, execute and measure their efforts.

To empower community members with knowledge about the health of their communities, the Division of Public Health recently launched the My Healthy Community data portal.² Users can find neighborhood-focused data at the smallest geographical area available, and explore factors about the chronic disease, healthy lifestyles, maternal and child health, substance abuse and mental health, community safety, health-related environmental factors, health services

utilization, infectious disease and community characteristics. Community leaders have let us know that when they are equipped with more health-related information, they are better able to take action to improve the determinants of health most relevant to them.

Delaware's spending on medical care continues to rise and this number is expected to double by 2025. By taking a place-based approach to invest in the social determinants of health, HCD expects to reduce health care costs and strengthen communities. "Alignment, Investment, Impact" isn't just a tagline; it is a paradigm shift and is what is needed to move the needle on our poor health outcomes and unacceptable health disparities. We are thrilled to be working together, and with a variety of key partners across multiple sectors within our state and, most importantly, in our communities. Please join us in changing the paradigm.

References

1. Places, B. H. (2019). Principles for building healthy and prosperous communities. Retrieved from: <https://buildhealthyplaces.org/principles-for-building-healthy-and-prosperous-communities/>
2. Delaware Department of Health and Social Services. (2019). My healthy community data portal. Retrieved from: <https://myhealthycommunity.dhss.delaware.gov/>

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