

 Health Leads

Local Innovation, National Learning

Creating a New Vision for Racial Health Equity and Community Care



2021 IMPACT REPORT

A Message From Alexandra Quinn, CEO

Dear Friends,

As I pen this letter, I am marking my four-year anniversary as CEO, with half of my tenure set against the backdrop of COVID-19. What a privilege it has been to work with all of you—our community-based partners, philanthropic supporters, and not-for-profit leaders across the globe. The collaborations and friendships we've forged gave me and my team the energy and momentum to face even the most difficult challenges.

As the effects of COVID-19 reverberated across the country, Health Leads continued our work to understand [how the essential resource landscape was shifting](#) as a result of the pandemic and what our partners and clients in health care, community, and government needed in this unprecedented challenge. The results were clear—our country's health care, public health, and social services systems were not designed to withstand a pandemic of this magnitude. The data strongly indicated that what started as a health pandemic would soon turn into a mental health, housing, food, education, employment, and safety crisis from which it would take years to recover. All of our long-standing—and often ignored—health inequities were suddenly laid bare for more and more people to see, understand, and take action against.

In spite of the incredibly difficult economic times, we were fortunate our board and philanthropic partners saw increasing value in rallying around our work. This made it possible for Health Leads to hold true to its mission, values, and impact areas, while also enabling us to strategically pivot to address the immediate needs of our health care, community, and local government partners as part of a national "Respond & Rebuild" effort. That work has since evolved into a growing, national movement for racial health equity and has reinforced our unwavering commitment to a world in which health is driven by, designed by, and centered in community.

Amidst the destruction and chaos that the pandemic unleashed, it has also offered a myriad of lessons and a new set of learning questions that will enable us to not only more effectively respond to and weather the storm of the current and future pandemics, but rethink and redesign health to center our collective well-being and dignity.

Here are just a few questions we are discussing as a team and with our partners:

1 HOLISTIC & HYPER-LOCAL COMMUNITY INVESTMENT

How can we support efforts to channel resources to local public health and community-driven organizations that drive toward processes, practices, and policies rooted in racial health equity?

2 SYSTEMS SOLUTIONS FOR SYSTEMS CHALLENGES

How can we move our emergency responses, and our public health responses, away from individual blame and instead acknowledge that the pandemic has merely magnified pre-existing systemic inequities?

3 HUMAN-CENTERED NETWORKS OF HEALTH

What incentives and collaborations are necessary to establish strong, proactive, and locally-focused networks of health and equity, capable of caring for the whole person with cultural humility and empathy?

All of this work is made possible thanks to each and every one of you who share and champion Health Leads' vision: our friends, donors, board members past and present, alumni, and our network of national, regional, and local partners. With your support, we enter 2022 ready to strengthen community-based workforces and organizations, break down barriers to essential health resources, and dismantle systemic inequities and racism.

This is the work of generations. Thank you for working with us toward this vision where every person, in every community, lives with health, well-being, and dignity.



With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alexandra M. Quinn".

ALEXANDRA QUINN,
CEO, Health Leads



INTRODUCTION

The Future of Public Health and Emergency Response is Local

When COVID-19 hit our shores, Black, Latino/a, Indigenous, Asian, Pacific Islander, and other communities of color were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and its economic aftershocks. This crisis made our mission and mandate even clearer: We must work toward a vision of health that centers not on hospitals and specialty care, but rather on the community-based organizations and local public health institutions on the frontlines of racial health equity across the nation.

To do this, Health Leads identifies, amplifies, and invests in strengthening our national community-based workforces, advancing community-led health equity innovation, and convening our partners to support these efforts. Whether it's unleashing the power of caregivers, ceding and seeding power in communities, decolonizing and democratizing community health data, or mobilizing resources to hyper-local solutions, these efforts can transform the health of entire communities. Leveraging Health Leads' regional and national platform and leadership, we committed resources to amplifying the voices and bright spots of community-based leaders from coast-to-coast to spread real-time learnings nationally and help catalyze innovation across the frontlines of health equity.

To support this work in 2021, Health Leads and our partners have built and grown multi-sector initiatives to strengthen the capacity of health equity efforts that can have a transformative impact locally and spread nationally. For example:

- In Boston, we're redesigning and supporting **community creation of a hyper-local, crisis-resilient food system** that closes the gaps that leave our neighbors without access to nutritious, healthy food.
- In New York City, we're **transforming maternal health care by creating new systems** and processes to support mothers and children through pregnancy and early life.
- In California, we're building a **prevention-focused, community-owned network to keep residents housed** and working with communities across the state to design and pilot a new way of connecting residents to resources like food and healthcare.
- Nationally, our Vaccine Equity Cooperative is enabling **equitable vaccine distribution and democratizing vaccine information to support community-driven vaccination efforts**—and applying learnings from this effort to begin addressing the other pressing health equity issues, like global mental health crisis.

Guided by our values of inclusion and shared leadership, we are committed to working side-by-side with communities to make our shared vision a reality. And together, we've raised **\$3.4M to date for pass-through funds** that are going directly to the initiatives and communities on the front lines of health equity innovation.

Thanks to our entire community of health equity champions and partners, we're redesigning the social safety net and will continue to work diligently towards the day where real, enduring health equity becomes a reality for all.

 Health Leads

Our Initiatives



Building an Equitable Food Ecosystem in Boston

Developing a neighbor-to-neighbor approach to ending food insecurity

When COVID-19 arrived and shelter-in-place orders were issued nationally, millions were left without reliable access to healthy, nutritious food. Even in the midst of a catastrophic breakdown of social services, people in crisis were expected to navigate complex and siloed systems to access food—often waiting hours outside food banks or traveling to distribution centers via public transportation, risking exposure to COVID. But what if we had a more equitable food system that effectively distributed food during times of crisis, made accessing food easy, and closed gaps in the safety net that allowed people to go hungry in the first place?

Health Leads is partnering directly with community members in Boston's Hyde Park, Dorchester, Mattapan, Roxbury, and Roslindale neighborhoods to pilot the Neighborhood Food Action Collaborative (NFAC), a unique, hyper-local model of food distribution. NFAC's food distribution hubs enable local residents to be at the center of decision-making processes, increase the amount of food available in their neighborhoods, set new standards for success, and offer individualized food resource navigation assistance, including SNAP enrollment.

Going forward, our aim is to redesign Boston's food ecosystem to move from stop-gap solutions to a sustainable, equitable system that ensures everyone can easily access the food we all need to be healthy.



Volunteers at the Hyde Park community food hub, one of several sites where we're partnering with residents to distribute food directly to their neighbors.

"It's truly a blessing to be able to work and organize in the same community where I live. Our Friday food distribution pop-up is church to me, because this is where I get to give back in a way that I can see makes a difference."

RIC HENRY, Community leader for the Hyde Park food pop-up



Accelerating Innovation in Equity-Oriented Primary Care

Reimagining primary care with a community and equity-focused approach

A growing body of evidence shows that national community-based community-health worker (CHW) programs are highly effective at addressing the root causes of illness. But the U.S. continues to rely on healthcare that focuses on clinical disease management, emergency visits, and specialty care services—creating a cycle in which care delivery focuses on treating the sickest patients in hospitals instead of directing resources towards prevention. But what if we could make primary care

and trusted CHWs the center of our health systems *and* embed equity into this practice?

To help make this vision a reality, Health Leads launched the Equity-Oriented Primary Care (EOPC) Innovation Collaborative. Comprised of three primary care teams in Tennessee, North Carolina, and Illinois with a demonstrated commitment to equity in their mission, leadership, and strategic focus, the EOPC Collaborative aims to provide integrated, whole-person care, improve the community conditions that impact health, foster champions to drive reform work across health systems, and establish cultures of racial equity—all while potentially saving thousands of lives and billions of dollars.

As the EOPC Collaborative designs new equity-oriented practices and strategies, we will catalyze the spread of these approaches by sharing them nationally to accelerate wider transformation efforts across the primary care health sector.

Designing and Building Equitable Community Resource Networks

Putting communities' health data into their own hands

Across the country, the pandemic has revealed and exacerbated the deep disparities in our health and social service systems. By siloing and fragmenting services for essential needs like food, housing, and medical care, our neighbors are forced to navigate complex and inequitable systems to get the essentials we all need to live healthy lives. But what if there was a better model for connecting these resources—one intentionally designed to advance racial health equity?



“If we are truly going to address racial health inequities, we must work deeply with community leaders and their community caregivers to fundamentally redesign the ways we support our communities. Health Leads’ approach to building community referral networks works to build our anti-racist capabilities as individuals and system leaders, and actively gives decision making power to the communities we seek to serve.”

SHIRIN VAKHARIA, Director for Health & Aging, Marin Community Foundation

In partnership with communities in California, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Texas—and nationally in partnership with 211 San Diego Community Information Exchange—Health Leads is co-designing and building community-governed, crisis-resilient community referral networks (CRNs): open, trusted networks that provide easy accessibility to community resources, track real-time data on availability, enable data-driven insights to drive system-level changes, and measure progress toward community health goals.

Communities should be the center of the very systems that intend to serve them. By ensuring they own and oversee community referral networks, together we can rebuild national and local systems, eliminate racial health disparities, and ensure everyone has access to the essential resources we all need to thrive.



Centering Caregivers and Community-Based Workforces

Unlocking the potential of caregivers on the frontlines of health equity

Community-based organizations (CBOs) and workforces (CBWs) have long been underfunded and under-supported, but proved to be absolutely critical to the COVID-19 response and vaccine rollout. But what if we invested in CBOs and CBWs as part of our recovery strategy, creating hyper-local, trusted methods for sustaining health and improving racial health equity?

In May 2020, thanks to HealthBegins, a core group of 10 organizations came together to launch the Community-Based Workforce Alliance (CBWA). Using the founding principles HealthBegins created and with a shared commitment to working side-by-side with communities, the CBWA advocates for CBWs, strengthens in-network communications, and builds stronger ties between this network and policymakers to bring increased support to their work. CBWA is also giving away more than \$300,000 to hyper-local CBOs through a match funding challenge. Health Leads also convenes the annual National Caregiver Summit, an event developed and designed by and for caregivers to strengthen, uplift, and expand their essential role in healthcare.

Together, these efforts are helping re-center care in communities, elevate the critical role trusted CBWs play in maintaining health locally, and create new healthcare career paths for hundreds of individuals in communities across the country.

Creating a Community-Led Eviction Prevention Network

Building a prevention-focused network to keep our neighbors housed



Access to safe, affordable housing is a key determinant of health. But rising rents and stagnant wages—combined with the legacy of racial discrimination in housing practices and the devastating effects of COVID-19—have worsened the housing crisis, disproportionately impacting our Black and Brown neighbors. But what if there was a trusted, reliable network of caregivers and community members who could provide resources and support to help keep people in their homes?

“To maintain safety in the environment of homelessness and living in crisis, folks need to know their rights. Folks need to be empowered in self-agency and the ability to thrive in their livelihoods. The work that Housing is Health is leading will pave the way for that. This is just another bridge that’s needed so we can further spread the network of resources for those who need it most.”

JO BRUNO, Community Leader, Housing is Health Advisory Group Member

In 2019, Health Leads—at the direction of community leaders and service providers—launched Housing is Health to begin designing a prevention-forward approach to the housing crisis. As shelter-in-place orders created financial uncertainty for our communities, Health Leads and our partners Tenants Together and Bay Area 211 service providers leveraged the Housing is Health network to create a large-scale eviction protection project. Centered on and led by the most impacted residents, the pilot program focuses on increasing housing stability and helping community members prevent and respond to eviction proceedings.

Together, we’re expanding residents’ awareness of their housing rights and resources; maximizing the number of community members and caregivers who are positioned to help residents before they are at risk of eviction, and supporting local organizing efforts to advance more just housing policies.



Reimagining Maternal & Postpartum Healthcare in New York

Streamlining access to benefits so new mothers and their families can focus on their health

Access to essential resources during pregnancy and postpartum years has an outsized impact on women and children’s health. However, expectant and new mothers must often navigate complex and biased social service systems to get the bare minimum they need, with Black women disproportionately impacted. In New York City, Black women are three times more likely than white women to experience childbirth complications and adverse outcomes.¹ What if these systems could be redesigned with Black mothers, their families, and culturally competent caregiving at their cores?

In collaboration with community and health system partners such as New York Health + Hospitals and Brownsville Multi Service Family Health and Wellness Centers, New York State’s WIC Program, SNAP, and Medicaid, Health Leads’ New York Maternal Health Program is reimagining maternal and postpartum healthcare. By placing mothers and children at its center and strengthening the existing network of culturally competent health navigators equipped to help families access and maintain services crucial for family health, this initiative is connecting families to the essential resources like food and healthcare they need to thrive.

Through this, we are developing a scalable approach that reimagines the integration of healthcare and social services to the benefit of families. And looking ahead, we can use learnings to strengthen this program and create a playbook other communities can use to support mothers and children during these crucial years.

¹ Source: CDC

Vaccine Equity Cooperative

COVID-19 sparked a health equity movement— and vaccines are just the beginning

The initial roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines in the U.S. failed to address legacies of medical racism and experimentation on communities of color. As community-based caregivers and organizations stepped up to fill gaps in knowledge and care, Health Leads and our partners felt strongly that this moment could be a turning point that ignited a new national health equity movement.



In October 2020, Health Leads joined with 20+ organizations to create the *Vaccine Equity Cooperative* (VEC). Together, VEC members issued a joint statement that outlined principles for equitable vaccine rollouts and affirmed vaccine distribution as an opportunity to acknowledge and correct the failings of the pandemic response and begin a healing process from generations of disparity in health status and outcomes. Additionally, we created an online resource hub offering community-focused resources and elevated bright spots in community-led vaccine access and uptake efforts.

“The COVID-19 vaccination effort is a critical opportunity to advance long-term racial and health equity solutions. By bridging the gap between national and local efforts, the Vaccine Equity Cooperative is strengthening community-level public health infrastructure, helping to create more sustainable and equitable systems of health for children, families, and communities.”

CAROLINE BRUNTON, Program Officer for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation

But we can't move the needle on health equity if we don't address the broken systems that impact health. In the coming months, Health Leads and our VEC partners will begin to transition beyond a focus on vaccines to support other critical and timely issue areas, including a new focus on mental health and community-based organization sustainability. Our work to build trust between communities and systems, curate community-centric resources, improve capacity and infrastructure at the local level, and empower community-based organizations and leaders will be sustained beyond vaccination efforts to enable broader, more sustainable gains in health equity.



Our Supporters

We are deeply grateful to all the friends and partners who support our work, and we proudly recognize those who made gifts in 2021.

Your generous financial support has made possible the key victories and growth we celebrate this year. Thank you!

INDIVIDUALS

\$100,000+

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INSTITUTIONS



Our Partners

Health Leads is deeply grateful to work in partnership with leaders across the health equity ecosystem as well as the local institutions and community-based organizations on the frontlines of racial health equity. Together, we're building a future where everyone, in every community, can achieve health and well-being. Some of our partners include:

211 San Diego

Action for Boston Community Development

After School All Stars

All Home

Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative

Benefits Data Trust

BMS Family Health and Wellness Center

Boston Food Access Council (BFAC)

Boston Public Health Commission

Brigham and Women's Faulkner Hospital

Brooklyn Perinatal Network

Camden Coalition in New Jersey

Caribbean Women's Health Association

CDC Foundation

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Karen L. Smith MD, PA.**

Food Access Volunteers of Roslindale (FAVOR)

G.W. Carver Grand Lodge

Greater Boston Food Bank

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Public Health Solutions

Redwood Community Health Coalition

Roslindale Food Collective (RFC)

SNAP Gap/Common App Coalition

Social Current

Streetwyze

Tenants Together

The National Alliance for Caregiving (NAC)

Think Together

United Way Bay Area

Vital CxNs

West County Health Center

Our Leadership and Staff

We are a group of dedicated advocates, researchers, clinicians, and community organizers working tirelessly to drive our vision of health, dignity, and well-being for every person in every community.

With strong ties to their local communities, our staff ensures Health Leads' activities advance power-sharing with and for historically marginalized populations. Together, we apply over 25 years of experience and leadership to build healthy communities across the country.

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Join Us

The hard-won achievements of Health Leads and our partners since the onset of the pandemic prove just how much is possible when we leverage our collective strength to develop powerful solutions to our shared challenges.

And today, we're seeing countless organizations and communities working tirelessly on efforts that could help return us to a pre-pandemic normal. But for many Black, Latino/a, Native, Asian, Pacific Islander, and other communities of color, going back to "normal" means continuing to endure the destructive impacts of racism, systemic inequity, poverty, and bias that drive inequitable health outcomes in the first place.

At Health Leads, we refuse to go back to that normal. The time to meaningfully move the needle on racial health equity is now. We must continue working together to address COVID-19's aftershocks and embed health equity in our communities:



Mental health will take center stage in the coming years as the emotional and social impacts of the pandemic continue to surge. Health Leads stands ready with strategies, learnings, resources, national recognition, and a trusted platform we can use to advance equitable and community-centered mental health solutions by mobilizing resources, bringing recognition to hyper-local bright spots, and leveraging our platform to accelerate the learning and spread of these ideas.



Policy, philanthropy, business, and public health stakeholders will need to join forces with community-based organizations to catalyze hyper-local innovation and bolster the capacity of local workforces and caregivers. Health Leads has deep experience training and supporting community-based health workers and the partnerships needed to reroute resources to sustain these essential workers.



The fact that essential resources like housing, food, and transportation drive and maintain health is undeniable. Health Leads brings 25+ years of expertise in community-based health and social system integration to this crucial moment when the two must work together to improve health.

2022 will be another crucial year for health equity, and we refuse to sit on the sidelines when there's so much at stake. To fight the pandemic and its aftershocks—as well as to prepare for future pandemics and crises—organizations that bridge the gaps between philanthropy, private sector investment, and hyper-local efforts have become increasingly important. That's why Health Leads is committed to leveraging our unique program model to increase our pass-through grants to community-based organizations, having raised an estimated total of **\$3.4M to date**.

When you give to Health Leads, you're investing in cutting-edge health equity innovations and supporting community-based efforts that are putting these ideas into action locally and nationally.

2022 must become the year we make health equity in all its forms *the* priority for not only our shared recovery, but a shared transformation in this country. Join us in this effort to ensure every person in every community can live with health, well-being, and dignity.

Contact us to learn more about investment opportunities:



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Appendix: Featured Resources

By having one foot in local care delivery markets and one foot in our national learning platform, Health Leads is uniquely positioned to drive innovative community approaches to the center of health practice and policy. Over the past year, we've worked to accelerate the collection, sharing, and dissemination of research, resources, and tools that place equity at the core of care. See below for some of our top resources:

WEBINARS & EVENTS



Beyond Do No Harm: Structural Racism in Tech-Forward SDOH Solutions

Hundreds of new SDOH programs, apps, and datasets have entered the health tech space. But how can we address the ways these tech-forward approaches perpetuate structural racism and bias? In this webinar recording, Rey Faustino, Ngozi Moses, MSc, Jen Lewis-Walden, Jason Cunningham, and Artair Rogers discuss the risks of normalizing bias in SDOH technology and offer practical steps to address and limit community harm.



The National Caregiver Summit 2021

Caregivers play an integral role in supporting communities—from caring for aging parents to connecting neighbors with trusted local resources. But too often, caregivers face obstacles to performing this vital work, including unfair pay, inequitable hiring practices, and few opportunities for professional advancement. Designed by and for caregivers, the National Caregiver Summit fostered learning, drove collaboration, and advanced key advocacy efforts.

RESOURCES



Bringing Light & Heat: A Health Equity Guide For Healthcare Transformation And Accountability

As more and more healthcare leaders move to make health equity central to their organization's mission, the question of how to translate mission into effective and sustainable action remains paramount. *Bringing Light & Heat: A Health Equity Guide to Healthcare Transformation and Accountability* provides a roadmap for healthcare leaders committed to advancing racial justice and holding themselves and their organizations accountable in this work.



HealthBegins' Community-Based Workforce Principles for Pandemic Response and Resilience

Developed by HealthBegins and adopted by the Community-Based Workforce Alliance, these core guiding principles identify strategies to ensure COVID-19 response and rebuild efforts are shaped by and embedded within the communities that have been most impacted by the pandemic.

BLOG POSTS



Data Democratization: The Unsung Hero of Health Equity

As communities across the country demonstrate that putting data into their hands empowers them to improve the systems that impact their health, ensuring widespread data democratization is key to meaningfully advancing health equity. In this blog post, Health Leads' Sheena Nahm-McKinley and Elizabeth Sites provide an overview of data democratization, identify and amplify bright spots in data democratization, and connect this practice to racial equity and systems change efforts.



Addressing Systemic Inequities and Racism in Community-Based Organization Funding—Vaccine Equity Cooperative

"CBO and CBW proximity to and trust with community members, understanding of local cultures, and expertise in navigating local systems launched CBOs and CBWs into the spotlight as key to our pandemic response and recovery." In this blog post, members of the Vaccine Equity Cooperative and the Community-Based Workforce Alliance discuss the need for increased CBO and CHW funding, and outline practical steps to close funding gaps to create more resilient care ecosystems.



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