NCIOM
North Carolina Institute of Medicine

CHAPTER 4

COLLECTIVE IMPACT: STRENGTHENING THE POWER OF PUBLIC HEALTH'S COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

RECOMMENDATION 1..... 36

Community partnerships are vital to the work of local public health. It is impossible for public health alone to address all issues that impact the health and well-being of a community, as influences on social and economic factors, the physical environment, health behaviors, and clinical care span a wide range of sectors. While the work of partnering to address these issues is vital to improving community health, funding is often inadequate for these efforts, as federal and state dollars are typically earmarked for specific diseases or public health programs rather than cross-cutting community improvement projects. Health departments often need to prioritize staff time and responsibilities for funded services and programs. This can leave limited financial resources and staff capacity left over to dedicate to important partnership efforts.

> **"Improvements in our nation's health can be achieved only when we have the commitment to move even further upstream to change the community conditions that make people sick. The demand for social needs interventions won't stop until the true root causes are addressed."**
>
> *-Castrucci B, Auerbach J. Meeting individual social needs falls short of addressing social determinants of health. Health Affairs. January 16, 2019.*
>
> *https://www.healthaffairs.org/do/10.1377/forefront.20190115.234942/*

Even with adequate resources, public health could not single-handedly address all the factors at the root of community health challenges. Essential knowledge, expertise, and trusted voices in the community are vital to making an impact. Parents, educators, business leaders, health care providers, law enforcement, aging-services providers, community leaders, grass roots community organizers, and transportation professionals are just a few of the community groups with intimate knowledge of programs, policies, and systems that impact health.

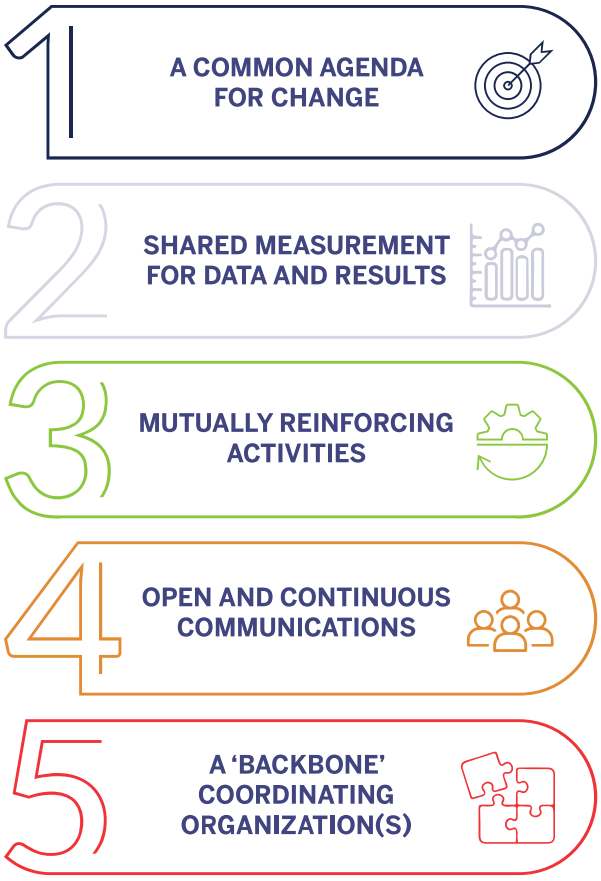
Despite limited resources, local health departments have worked in their role as "Chief Health Strategist"[A] to foster partnerships across sectors that make important changes and improvements in the communities they serve to positively impact health. And yet, long-standing policy and system factors make it a continuing challenge to address unequal opportunities to live in healthy environments and make healthy choices. Evolving these partnerships through the collective impact framework can build a shared plan of action to address root causes of community health outcomes. The collective impact framework (see Figure 6) involves a long-term investment of time and energy, calling on partners to:[1,2]

- Develop a common agenda for change
- Measure the same things to understand results
- Align activities to the common goal
- Engage in open and continuous communications
- Identify a coordinating organization(s)

The collective impact framework shifts the paradigm of partnership from working on the same issue to working ***toward the same outcome*** and shares power among all members of the partnership.[3]

> **"Collective impact" describes an intentional way of working together and sharing information for the purpose of solving a complex problem. Proponents of collective impact believe that the approach is more likely to solve complex problems than if a single nonprofit were to approach the same problem(s) on its own. While collective impact seems very similar to plain old "collaboration," there are certain characteristics that distinguish collective impact initiatives - and make them successful."**
>
> *-National Council of Nonprofits, Collective Impact*
>
> *https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/collective-impact*

Figure 6. The Collective Impact Framework



Source: Source: Adapted from University of Southern California Student Affairs. Strategi Plan 2017-2020. https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/2017-2020-strategic-plan/usc-student-well-being-collective-impact/

[A] *See Chapter 1. Public Health 3.0 calls on local public health to engage in cross-sector partnerships as a "Chief Health Strategist" to address root causes of health outcomes.*

In North Carolina, the collective impact framework is being used already in many communities. With support from The Duke Endowment and technical assistance from the North Carolina Healthcare Foundation and Population Health Improvement Partners, communities participating in Healthy People, Healthy Carolinas are engaging in cross-sector partnerships across the state:[4]

- **Chatham Health Alliance** – Nearly 100 member entities and organizations have come together "to work on issues affecting health in Chatham County, with a focus on the health priorities identified in the Community Health Assessment: Access to Comprehensive Health Services, Equity, Healthy Eating, Active Living, and Economic Stability & Resilience."[5]
- **Granville Working on Wellness (WOW!)** – This group is working on the "overarching goal of improving child health and wellbeing in Granville and Vance counties through health promotion efforts targeting nutrition and physical activity." Granville Vance Health Department serves as the convener with 14 participating organizations and 8 school partners.[6]
- **Brunswick Wellness Coalition** – This coalition of 37 partners is working together to "share resources and support to prevent disease and promote health."[7]
- **Pitt Partners for Health** – More than 30 community organizations are working together to "collaboratively respond to the compelling health needs of Pitt County residents through assessment, resource identification and development, citizen advocacy, comprehensive planning and coordination of health intervention and prevention strategies."[8]
- **Healthy Rowan** – This partnership of more than 30 organizations "seeks to utilize the collaborative strength of many community partners to identify and address health and quality of life issues in Rowan County."[9]

These types of multi-sector collaboratives have long been cultivated by local public health departments, but they are growing in size, complexity, and sophistication as communities recognize that their paths to prosperity and community well-being require addressing persistent challenges such as health inequities, economic instability, civic engagement, and inclusion. For example, many local public health departments have long worked with public housing departments, private property rental companies, and housing service providers to improve housing quality, health, and safety in order to prevent asthma attacks, falls, and other health issues. These types of collaborative approaches that integrate health care providers, the private sector, and human services have grown throughout the state, and have led to a $650 million initiative within North Carolina's Medicaid program. Three communities currently serve as regional sites for our state's Healthy Opportunities Pilots, "the nation's first comprehensive program to test and evaluate the impact of providing select evidence-based, non-medical interventions related to housing, food, transportation, and interpersonal safety and toxic stress to high-needs Medicaid enrollees."[10] Across North Carolina, communities are "going upstream" and working together to make fundamental improvements in community conditions to ensure everyone has the opportunity to live a healthy life. Local public health must be resourced and equipped for leadership roles in this essential work.

Given the importance of partnerships in the work of local public health, opportunities to further increase their effectiveness, and the value of enhancing community voices, the task force recommends the following:

RECOMMENDATION 1

Evolve local public health's role as Chief Health Strategist by implementing a collective impact framework to address community health priorities

Two strategies are recommended by the Task Force on the Future of Local Public Health to move to a future vision of effective partnerships that address systems-level issues impacting community health outcomes:

Strategy 1a. Growing Skills and Shared Vision for Collective Impact Local health departments should grow staff roles, skills, and knowledge of: the Collective Impact framework; group and partnership facilitations; and health equity, risk assessment, and strategic partnerships.

Strategy 1b. Partnership Learning Collaborative The North Carolina Public Health Association and North Carolina Institute for Public Health should develop a learning collaborative, or support existing collaboratives, focused on opportunities for those in local public health to gain knowledge and share best practices for engaging in the activities listed in Strategy 1a.

[A] *See Chapter 1. Public Health 3.0 calls on local public health to engage in cross-sector partnerships as a "Chief Health Strategist" to address root causes of health outcomes.*

Strategy 1a – Growing Skills and Shared Vision for Collective Impact

Local health departments should enhance their role in pursuing programs and policies to advance population health by:

1. Participating in existing leadership training opportunities to enhance skills and knowledge in:
   a. The Collective Impact framework,
   b. Group and partnership facilitation, and
   c. Health equity, risk assessment, and strategic partnerships.
2. Incorporating relationship-building as a core function of staff positions that are reliably funded, with accountability to ensure staff can prioritize relationship/partnership-building among their other responsibilities.
3. Pursuing opportunities to implement the collective impact framework to address pressing community health issues with community members and stakeholders across sectors (e.g., education, child care, business, health care, transportation, and housing).
4. Developing strong and effective collaborations with health care systems, primary care providers, Medicaid Prepaid Health Plans, and other payers serving the community to align population health goals.
5. Establishing connections with local community development organizations, chambers of commerce, and private sector businesses to cultivate knowledge, support, and advocacy for the role of local public health in maintaining a healthy workforce and increasing economic development.

Desired Result

Health departments will have increased staff capacity and competency to lead effective partnerships using the collective impact framework to address root causes of community health issues.[8] Local health departments and their partners will share goals, align activities, and work together to create communities where everyone has the opportunity to be healthy.

Why does the task force recommend this strategy?

While partnerships are key to the success of local public health, the staff effort required to develop and lead or participate in partnerships is often unfunded. Implementing core responsibilities for staff specific to partnership development will highlight the importance of this work. Training is also needed to increase competencies to effectively lead partnerships and engage those outside public health as leaders. Potential partners have a spectrum of knowledge and interest in the work of public health. Health care systems and providers have an interest in the health of communities. Local health departments should work closely with them to develop a shared vision. In the broader community outside of health and health care, groups like business leaders do not necessarily have close involvement with public health but can still serve as advocates for the work of local public health to foster the well-being of the workforce and promote economic growth.

Additional Context

As Chief Health Strategist, local public health has an important role to play in partnerships to create healthier communities. The work of identifying potential partnerships, cultivating productive collaboration, and designing, executing, and evaluating a shared strategy requires significant skills, time, and attention. While these partnerships may be formed around public health goals, they may also have beneficial influence on economic stability, educational outcomes, community well-being, and other factors outside of traditional health concerns. However, limited budgets and strict requirements from many funding sources are barriers to the staff time and capacity needed to lead or participate in these partnerships. For local public health to play this essential community leadership role, an investment in capacity is necessary. Recommendations and strategies throughout this report are intended to build the staff capacity and funding needed to enhance the partnership capabilities of local public health. In particular, see:

- **Strategy 2a**, Page 43 – Drive improvement and strengthen connectivity [of public health data systems]
- **Strategy 2c**, Page 45 – Evolve health department data capabilities
- **Strategy 4a**, Page 60 – Develop statewide accountability for the public health workforce
- **Strategy 6b**, Page 82 – Evaluate innovative models and best practices
- **Strategy 6c**, Page 84 – Support opportunities for innovation
- **Strategy 7b**, Page 96 – Predictable funding for local public health
- **Strategy 7c**, Page 98 – Local funding to support community-specific needs
- **Strategy 7d**, Page 99 – Collaborative funding for innovation

Several training resources can aid in building community partnerships and promoting health equity. These include:

- The **North Carolina Institute for Public Health (NCIPH)** at the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill Gillings School of Global Public Health – "Leading with Equity" training series
- **WNC Health Network** - Paid services are available to "design and lead effective meetings that move diverse stakeholders from talk to action."[11]
- The **North Carolina Public Health Training Center** at the University of North Carolina - Wilmington College of Health and Human Services – "Health Equity Leadership During and Beyond the COVID-19 Crisis"
- **Region IV Public Health Training Center** through the Public Health Learning Network – Many trainings on partnership, including "Becoming the Health Strategist: Putting Your Skills into Action;" "Cross-Sector Collaboration – Easy to Say, Challenging to Do: An Introduction to PHRASES;" and "Embracing Public Health 3.0 and Creating Cross-Sector Partnerships."[12]

[8] *""Collective impact" describes an intentional way of working together and sharing information for the purpose of solving a complex problem. Proponents of collective impact believe that the approach is more likely to solve complex problems than if a single nonprofit were to approach the same problem(s) on its own. While collective impact seems very similar to plain old "collaboration," there are certain characteristics that distinguish collective impact initiatives - and make them successful."*
National Council of Nonprofits, Collective Impact, https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/collective-impact

How would this impact the health of communities?

Increased knowledge and opportunities for collective impact have the potential to bolster the effectiveness of community partnerships. Effective partnerships and engaged community members lead to programs and policies that can directly improve health and economic opportunity by addressing the root causes of poor health outcomes in our state's unique communities.

Who is responsible?

- Local health departments

Who are the partners?

- Community members and leaders
- Community based organizations
- Medicaid Prepaid Health Plans and other health care payers
- Health care systems
- Health care providers
- Local community development organizations
- Chambers of commerce
- Private sector businesses

Strategy 1b – Partnership Learning Collaborative

The North Carolina Public Health Association and North Carolina Institute for Public Health should develop a learning collaborative, or support existing collaboratives, focused on helping those in local public health gain knowledge and share best practices to engage in activities listed in Strategy 1a.

Desired Result

Local health departments will be engaged in shared learning to promote best practices and share successes in effective community partnership to improve health and well-being.

Why does the task force recommend this strategy?

Local public health departments engage in partnerships that are unique collaborations designed to address their communities' priorities. There is often great potential for lessons learned or opportunities to replicate similar efforts in other parts of the state. A learning collaborative creates a structure for sharing this information to learn from and encourage others, as well as creating a sense of accountability to the group to evolve and improve their leadership practices in community partnerships.

Additional Context

Two responsible organizations are identified for this strategy **- The North Carolina Public Health Association (NCPHA)** and the **North Carolina Institute for Public Health (NCIPH)**. NCPHA's mission is, in part, to improve public health through professional development and integrate research with the practice of public health, while NCIPH seeks to improve public health practice and build capacity.[13,14] These shared interests naturally lend themselves to development of learning opportunities to support stronger capacity and strategies for community partnership.

Other organizations in North Carolina are already convening regional collaboratives for these types of discussions and should be consulted to learn best practices. For example, **Western North Carolina Health Network (WNCHN)** convenes 16 local health departments, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Department of Public Health and Human Services, and health care partners in the WNC Healthy Impact Network. Among a variety of activities, WNC Healthy Impact engages in peer learning through regular study halls and shared learning and support for meaningful community engagement.

Community experience and perspectives must be included in the development of, and dialogue about, the learning, tools, and best practices to be shared in a learning collaborative such as the one recommended in this strategy. As the intended purpose of such a collaborative is to promote effective community partnerships, community leaders outside of the local public health sector should be included in this ongoing dialogue. This could include leaders representing existing partnerships with public health or other sectors.

How would this impact the health of communities?

Successes in one area of the state can be tailored to address similar health needs in another area of the state. Shared learning about successes and partnership facilitation can directly benefit communities that are working to address their specific needs and might be in different stages of partnership development and program or policy implementation.

Who is responsible?

- North Carolina Public Health Association
- North Carolina Institute for Public Health

Who are the partners?

- Other non-governmental public health organizations
- Community members and leaders
- Community based organizations

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