

People, Places, Partnerships at the Heart of Success in California's Building a Movement of Movements

BY LISA HERSHEY

In 2007, the California Endowment and Kaiser Permanente decided to combine some of their investments and political will and shift from local isolated projects to a convergence approach in the hope of stimulating shared goals, collective action, and greater collective impact as well as accelerating this movement for change. In 2008, California Convergence joined the Healthy Communities Movement in California.

Over the past five years, California Convergence has evolved into a network of people who are passionate about creating healthier communities. Across the state, California Convergence community leaders are working together to determine shared priorities, identify resources, and connect with people and organizations that help fight for—and win—lasting change. California Convergence puts people first, because policies grown from the ground up have a better chance of creating communities where everyone can participate and prosper.

California Convergence unites the people who make decisions that affect California's health and prosperity with the people most affected by those decisions, sparking action that leads to more equitable and safer and healthier communities. California Convergence community leaders identify issues that impact their communities most and work hand in hand with state advocates to advocate for policy change at the state, regional, and local levels. Recently, California Convergence has contributed to the passage of the following legislation:

- Continued Funding for Fitnessgram Physical Fitness Test
- Expanding Safe Routes to Schools
- Health and Equity and Transportation Planning

- Healthy Food Financing Initiative Safe Routes to Schools

California Convergence has movement-building strengths beyond policy change. Kaiser Permanente commissioned the Center for Community Health and Evaluation to conduct an evaluation of California Convergence in 2011. Findings indicated that California Convergence contributed to these impacts:

- Building an authentic base of civically engaged community members through strategic use of leadership development and advocacy capacity building
- Bringing community voices to advocacy events in Sacramento to inform and educate legislators on priorities that improve equity, safety, and health in communities
- Connecting allies across the state to create healthier food and activity environments
- Creating a healthier beverage environment (increasing water access and consumption, decreasing consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages, and changing the conversation about soda)
- Creating and implementing joint-use agreements around the state and supporting local implementation
- Convening potential partners, such as parks and recreation agencies, schools, and families
- Facilitating Safe Routes to School policy implementation
- Encouraging and streamlining applications for complex federal funding opportunities that are focused on environmental and policy change

Through funding opportunities such as Communities Putting Prevention to Work in 2010 and

Community Transformation Grants in 2011, California Convergence has advocated for community leaders to have a seat at the table and play a significant role in the planning and implementation of each program.

California Convergence works locally to strategically support community leaders by sharing resources, offering capacity-building opportunities, and connecting peers and partners across the state. Because California Convergence believes that real change is possible only when all people participate, it works regionally to hold space for individuals and organizations from multiple sectors and fields to address common challenges, learn from each other, and build alliances that have lasting impact. Each member's success is a win for whole network. It also works statewide through its twenty-eight-member Steering Committee that guides and governs the California Convergence network, holds a shared vision, and strategically supports the community-driven advocacy infrastructure that advocates for changes that make a real difference in people's lives.

Challenges

California Convergence's greatest strengths are also its greatest challenges. California Convergence recognizes that social movements require long-term commitments and collaboration from everyone, including community leaders, multisector partners, and investors and are built off of a great deal of volunteerism, sweat, and tears. For example, it is a strength that many of California Convergence members volunteer their time and energy because they see the value of working together and contributing to the broader movement, but it is a challenge that volunteers and paid partners face numerous competing priorities with their limited resources and can burn out over time.

Roots are planted deeply in community, in the people on the ground, and in history and experience of the multisector, multifaceted strategies and social movements that came before. One strength is that policies grown from the ground up have a better chance of creating communities where everyone can participate and prosper. A challenge is that community issues and funder priorities do not always align; relationships are built on trust and history, and when

investments shift prematurely from the community perspective, trust is broken.

California Convergence grows its branches intricately intertwined with deep partnerships and growing alliances, but sometimes it is difficult to pinpoint the role the organization has played in effectuating a change. The convergence knows that in order to truly grow a movement and have significant and sustainable, collective impact, all players, including investors, need to agree to a shared vision, investments, and measurement.

Catalyst for Deeper Dialogue and Sustained Action for Impact at Scale: Opportunities for the Future

California Convergence is one of thirteen regional convergences that have grown under the National Convergence Partnership and recognizes the strength of these efforts across the country. Built on the powerful groundwork laid by Healthy Cities and Communities initiatives in collaboration with numerous moving parts, California sees the national and perhaps global opportunity to collectively:

- Build and mobilize an authentic grassroots base of residents who are civically engaged in dialogue and action to improve health and prosperity for all.
- Advance this work through stronger alliances among people from diverse sectors and fields who can collectively invest in communities for economic and social benefits.
- Confirm a shared vision, establish a Health in All Policies framework, and create shared measures to evaluate collective impact.
- Secure new social impact investments and redirect other resources (e.g., governmental) to pay for success to advance equity, social justice, and prosperity for all.

California Convergence holds hope for a vision where every resident has the power and the partnerships to collectively build equitable, safe, and healthy communities where every person participates and prospers.

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