



Healthy Neighborhood Investments

A Policy Scan & Strategy Map
Executive Summary

February 2021



Build Healthy
Places Network

Shift HEALTH
ACCELERATOR

SUPPORTED BY:

blue  of california
foundation

Blue Shield of California Foundation is an independent licensee of the Blue Shield Association

BUILD HEALTHY PLACES NETWORK
IS A PROGRAM OF:

 **PUBLIC
HEALTH**
INSTITUTE®



“Our best hope for escaping the adversity spiral and changing course is to organize local and nationwide action around a single unifying and measurable expectation: All people and places thriving—no exceptions.”

The Thriving Together Springboard (p.IV)

Visit <https://www.buildhealthyplaces.org/tools-resources/healthy-neighborhood-investments-policy-scan> to learn more and view the full report.

Executive Summary

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic and massive social unrest, fueled by over 400 years of harmful racial oppression and historical trauma particularly against Black and brown people, it is imperative to advance anti-racism in American laws, policies, and regulations to create community-level conditions that support health and opportunity for everyone. Multiple, sustained, and well-coordinated cross-sector efforts are needed to change the policy ecosystem and advance solutions toward racial equity, health equity, and improvement in the social determinants of health.

Revitalizing and repairing healthy neighborhoods through coordinated policy change can address systemic barriers, structural racism, and other root causes of poor health outcomes for low-income communities. We know this is possible because deliberate policy decisions and actions have contributed to the widest gaps in wellbeing and wealth between poor people of color and wealthy white people. *Healthy Neighborhood Investments: A Policy Scan & Strategy Map* recognizes that partnerships of communities, health systems, community development organizations, and local government are trying to clear the same historical and current policy hurdles in pursuit of aligned goals. These multi-sector partnerships, with careful intention to advance health and racial equity, can bring about policy change and impact the social determinants of health.

Build Healthy Places Network and Shift Health Accelerator partnered to identify policy actions for advancing racial and health equity through cross-sector investments and to serve as a tool for community-owned priority setting that reduces inequities and strengthens neighborhood revitalization, with a geographic emphasis on California. Our goals are to:

- Frame pathways and opportunities for community leaders to advocate for policy change by public health, healthcare, policymakers, and community development organizations;
- Identify policy barriers and ways to overcome them for joint investments in healthy neighborhoods that advance racial and health equity;
- Identify policies that create a more conducive environment for collaboration across sectors; and
- Incentivize the health sector to consider community development organizations as important partners in shaping policy and investments in healthy neighborhoods to advance racial and health equity.

The findings are a product of a literature review of 112 articles, interviews with 12 national policy experts, and conversations with policy and community advocates asking this question: *Which local, state, and federal policies can best lead to investments in healthy neighborhoods in ways that advance racial and health equity and wellbeing?* The key audience of this policy scan is multi-sector partnerships consisting of community members and health, community development, and local government actors that are focused on advancing health and racial equity.

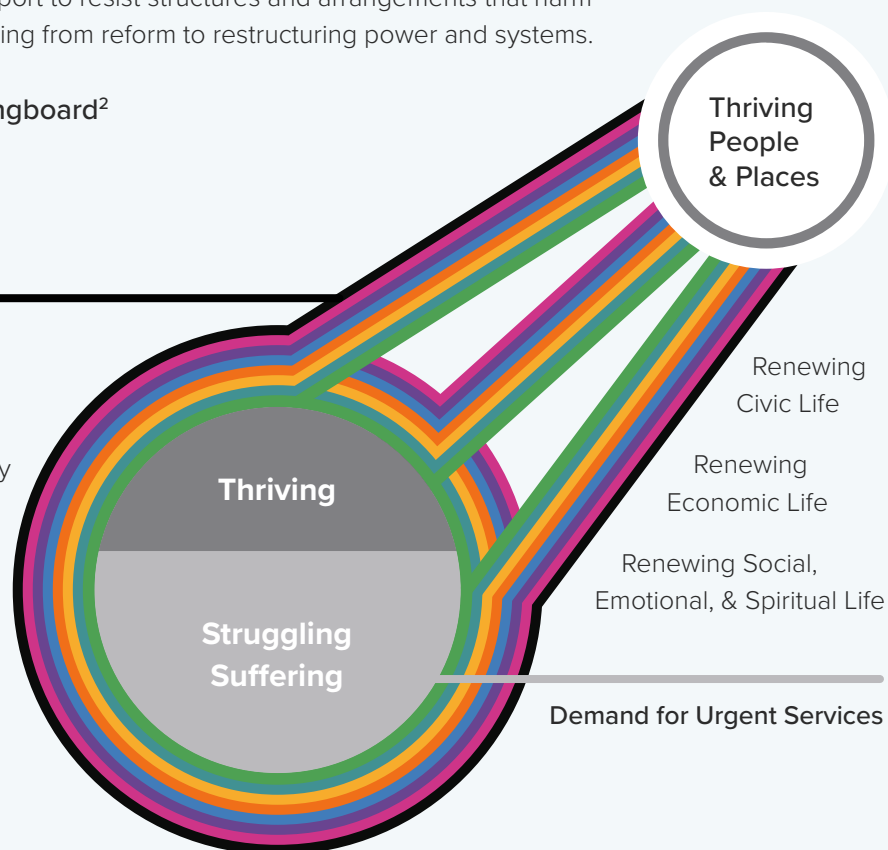
Individual and community wellbeing continues to be impeded by systemic racism. While a broad array of strategies are needed to eradicate racism and repair the harm done, policy change is one important tool available to pursue justice and wellbeing. This report provides a starting point for multi-sector partnerships to work side by side to transform the policy ecosystem on the basis of a “single unifying and measurable expectation: All people and places thriving—no exceptions.”¹

Thriving Together: A Springboard for Equitable Recovery and Resilience in Communities Across America by the [CDC Foundation](#) and [Well Being Trust](#) (2020) defines a set of vital conditions, the properties of places and institutions that everyone depends on to reach their potential. Policy strategies are provided for each of these vital condition categories: belonging and civic muscle; thriving natural world; basic needs for health and safety; humane housing; meaningful work and wealth; lifelong learning; and reliable transportation (see Figure i). This report uses the Thriving Together Springboard as a framework to conceptualize and organize hundreds of policy strategies within these vital condition categories. It is the authors’ collective hope that the policies set forth can help communities with the sustained support to resist structures and arrangements that harm others and offer paths forward, ranging from reform to restructuring power and systems.

Figure i. Thriving Together Springboard²

Legacies for living together

- Belonging & Civic Muscle
- Thriving Natural World
- + Basic Needs for Health & Safety
- ▲ Humane Housing
- Meaningful Work and Wealth
- Lifelong Learning
- Reliable Transportation



Policy Strategies

Each vital condition category is discussed in sections. First, we summarize the value of each vital condition individually. Second, we share a sample of potential policy strategies and federal, state, and local actions uncovered in the policy scan process to restore each vital condition. Third, each potential policy strategy is synthesized with attention to specific actions addressing social determinants of health, opportunities to advance racial and health equity, and opportunities to take action with a multi-sector partnership (Table i). Throughout all policy strategies, we identify state and local policy actions to highlight examples in the field.

Table i. Policy Strategies for Healthy Neighborhoods That Advance Racial and Health Equity



Belonging and Civic Muscle

Equitable decision-making must include the voices of those most impacted by decisions and provide structures and spaces for people to have the power to make the collective and civic decisions that shape their future. Decision-making power is far too often held by a few people, and belonging and civic muscle efforts should grow to engage people as equals, collectively, to make change.

Specific strategies: Make sure every person and their vote counts; Reform campaign finance; Fund community capacity and require community engagement; Collect and use disaggregated data; Commit to leadership development; Use comprehensive master plans (parks, housing, transport); Enact anti-displacement measures; Establish city and state racial equity umbrella policies; Improve intergovernment and interagency coordination; Promote equitable tax and revenue policy; Create flexible sources of funding.



Thriving Natural World

Natural and built environments significantly affect health, and climate change affects communities. Policy can prevent, reduce, or remediate people’s exposure to toxins in the environment and bring lifestyles into harmony with the natural processes that keep people healthy and resilient.

Specific strategies: Mitigate climate change; Improve climate resilience; Ensure universal access to clean, affordable water; Reduce exposure to extreme heat and air pollution; Ensure that everyone has a good park within a 10-minute walk; and Invest for multiple benefits.



Basic Needs for Health and Safety

Promoting physical health, mental health, and emotional resilience involves removing sources of harm, supporting recovery, and integrating all the aspects of care to meet the different needs of different communities and people. Safety creates freedom from harm or danger and prevents further trauma from occurring.

Specific strategies: Avoid harm and facilitate recovery; Promote maternal health and reduce infant mortality; Reduce domestic violence; Provide incentives for healthcare to invest in addressing social determinants of health; Co-locate services; Develop community approaches to public safety; End violence in the policing and criminal justice system; Improve healthcare access; Promote integrated approaches to care; Transform the healthcare workforce; Get and use data; Provide access to the good food individuals and communities want.



Humane Housing

Housing is a cornerstone of community development and a human right. Having access to a safe, affordable, stable, quality place to live is essential to health and economic wellbeing. Housing policies can help ensure that housing builds wealth, health, and community ownership.

Specific strategies: Build and renovate quality housing in places that need it; Help people afford and own good homes; Enable people to choose and stay in the homes they want; Provide housing for those experiencing homelessness; Promote responsible local ownership.



Meaningful Work and Wealth

Unless incomes grow for low-income families, the United States will never shrink the wealth gap associated with health inequities. With basic income security, families and communities can grow their wealth, save money, and invest to give the next generation a head start. Closing the wealth gap will require nondiscriminatory and equitable access to credit and lending, entrepreneurship, rewarding jobs, and business growth.

Specific strategies: Ensure equitable procurement; Cultivate job pathways; Advocate for universal basic income; Provide opportunities to save and invest; Improve access to capital; Provide good working conditions and protections; Support small businesses and entrepreneurs; Promote digital inclusion.



Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning creates leadership pathways, career choices, and opportunities to cultivate collective visions to advance racial and health equity. The power to dream and choose leads to health. There are opportunities to create universal access to early childhood education, shift how elementary and high school education is delivered, identify ways for education to be equitably funded, and prepare youth not just for jobs but for a choice of career pathways.

Specific strategies: Provide access to early childhood development and childcare; Support outside-of-school programs; Encourage joint use of facilities; Provide student loan forgiveness/tuition support; Reduce the incidence of adverse childhood experiences; Coordinate cradle-to-career partnerships; Meet students' basic needs.



Reliable Transportation

Having access to affordable, accessible transportation options that encourage physical activity and do not cause stress is important for health. It is also important that transportation not cause harm to people or the planet (e.g., increase pollution exposure, sever communities, or increase displacement).

Specific strategies: Commit to equitable transit-oriented development and anti-displacement; Provide transportation alternatives; Promote safe and accessible street design/planning; Provide flexible funding and infrastructure; Reduce commute times.

Cross-Cutting Policy Themes

The Policy Council convened for this report identified ten cross-cutting policy themes across the vital conditions that emerged against a backdrop of forces in 2020—the COVID-19 pandemic, calls for racial justice and the Black Lives Matter movement, climate impact from wildfires and hurricanes, and the November 2020 general election. This uncertain and disruptive environment has exposed deep cleavages in society and new policy opportunities to advance racial equity, health equity, and social justice. These cross-cutting policy themes offer the reader a way to understand the comprehensive list of policy strategies and actions, which are inextricably linked.

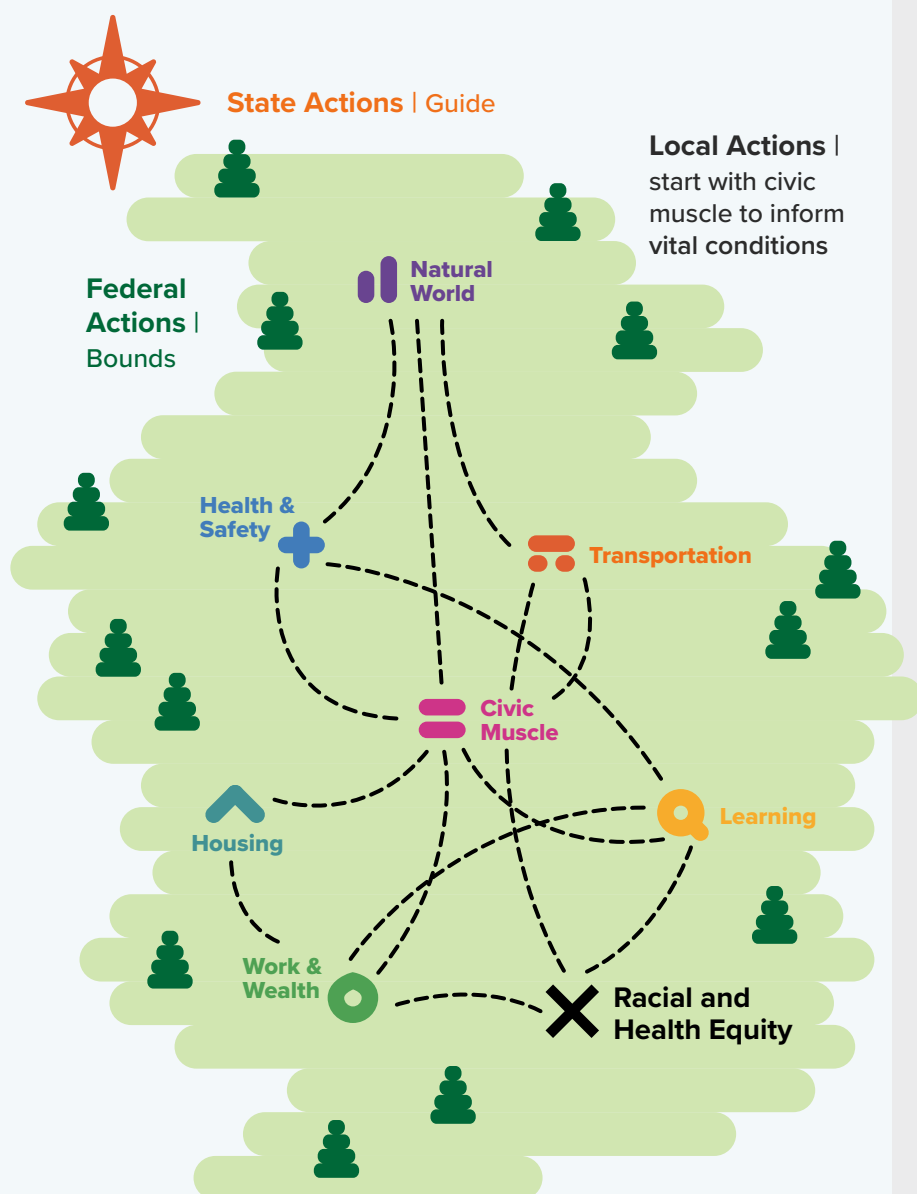
1. Leaning into belonging and civic muscle
2. Growing incomes and opportunities to build wealth
3. Creating opportunities for people to prosper in place (anti-displacement)
4. Ensuring quality and affordable housing
5. Strengthening climate justice and disaster resilience
6. Expanding community policing and cultural humility in mental health
7. Prioritizing good food
8. Expanding access to capital and entrepreneurship
9. Ensuring equitable mobility and transportation access
10. Preventing adverse childhood experiences and promoting trauma-informed systems

A Policy Treasure Map for Acting in Community

A policy treasure map (Figure ii) is provided as a tool for multi-sector partnerships acting in community for policy changes that build healthy neighborhoods and advance racial and health equity. This section is designed to provide a map of areas where community leaders, health, community development, and city and county officials can “dig” together to identify actions with a high potential for positive impact on racial and health equity. The focus is on local government because city and county governments have the power to integrate different aspects of policy, meaningfully engage the community, and shape how the built environment takes future generations into account.

Figure ii. A Policy Treasure Map for Racial and Health Equity

Following the treasure map are concrete, actionable steps that policy actors in partnerships can take to change the policy ecosystem to achieve racial and health equity. Multi-sector partnerships, with wide representation from community and institutional leaders, can explore ways of advancing policy change together, build trust and relationships to leverage and share power, and advance specific policy interventions toward achieving racial and health equity. We conclude by recommending next steps that the Build Healthy Places Network, Shift Health Accelerator, and the Healthy Neighborhood Investments Policy Council can take together in multi-sector partnerships to advance health and racial equity and show solidarity in redressing the hundreds of years of systemic racism.



How to Use This Document

The document is divided into sections:

Sections 1 through 3 (Goals and Introduction; Methods and Sources; and Policy Opportunity) present our intent, context, and a high-level case for focusing on policy that invests in healthy neighborhoods.

Section 4 (Potential Policy Strategies and Actions) includes a subsection for each vital condition that begins with a summary of how policy influences the vital condition and provides a table listing potential strategies and examples of policy actions at the federal, state, and local levels. The section continues with further detail on each policy strategy and the possible policy actions. Callout boxes focus mostly on state and local policies to highlight examples in the field.

Sections 5 through 7 (Cross-cutting Policy Themes; A Policy Treasure Map for Advancing Racial and Health Equity; and Next Steps) present policy themes raised as important by the Policy Council, suggestions for prioritizing policy strategies in your local community, and some next steps to take together.

Section 8 (References) provides all citations as endnotes, including a web link whenever possible.

Need Help Translating “Healthese” and “Community Developmentese”?

Build Healthy Places Network built a [Jargon Buster](#)³ to help with some key terms used in the language of the health and community development sectors.