



PLACE MATTERS for Health: Addressing the Root Causes of Racial and Ethnic Health Inequities

THE FACTS:

Many people of color have poorer health than national averages from the cradle to the grave, in the form of higher rates of infant mortality, chronic disease and disability, and premature death. These health inequalities cause tremendous human suffering, but affect all Americans: A study released by the Health Policy Institute of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies found that between 2003 and 2006, health and health care inequalities cost the nation \$1.24 trillion dollars in health care expenses as well as economic impacts, such as lost wages and productivity.

Many public health researchers believe that the fundamental problem underlying these inequities is residential segregation, which powerfully shapes health resources, risks, and life opportunities. Racial and ethnic minorities are more likely than whites to live in segregated, high-poverty communities, communities that have historically suffered from a lack of health care investment. Many of these communities also face a host of health hazards—such as high levels of air, water and soil pollution, and a glut of fast food restaurants and liquor stores—and have relatively few health-enhancing resources, such as grocery stores where fresh fruits and vegetables can be purchased, or safe parks and recreational facilities where residents can exercise or play.

THE INITIATIVE:

PLACE MATTERS is a national initiative of the National Collaborative for Health Equity (www.nationalcollaborative.org) designed to build the capacity of local leaders around the country to identify and improve social, economic, and environmental conditions that shape health. Our national learning community consists of 19 PLACE MATTERS Teams working in 27 jurisdictions. The objective of this initiative is to eliminate health disparities by identifying their complex underlying causes and defining strategies to address them. Addressing upstream causes of health (such as environmental health risks and issues related to employment, education, poverty, and housing) through community action, policy development, and measuring the indicators associated with these determinants of health are at the heart of our PLACE MATTERS work.

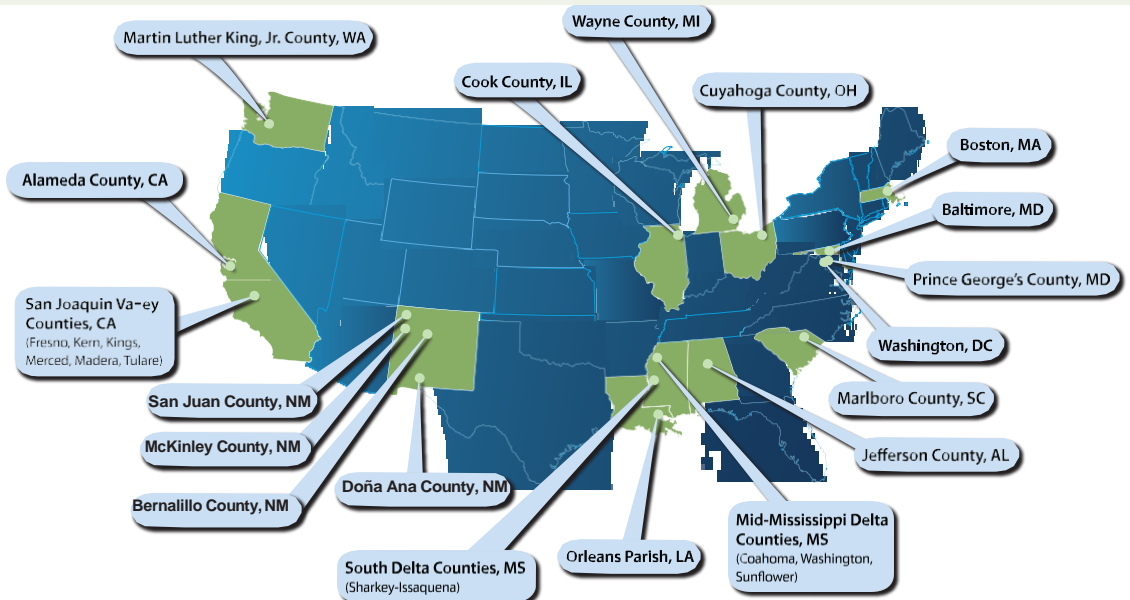
Inequities in health [and] avoidable health inequalities arise because of the circumstances in which people grow, live, work, and age, and the systems put in place to deal with illness. The conditions in which people live and die are, in turn, shaped by political, social, and economic forces.

*World Health Organization,
Report on the Social
Determinants of Health (2008)*

PLACE MATTERS addresses these challenges by helping empower communities to identify and address neighborhood social and economic conditions that shape health. These include efforts to:

- Create incentives for better food resources and options in underserved communities (such as bringing in full-service grocery stores and “farmers’ markets” to areas where there are few options to purchase fresh and wholesome foods);
- Develop community-level interventions for promoting active living by improving land use and increasing access to parks and recreational facilities; and,
- Address environmental injustice through aggressive monitoring and enforcement of laws aimed at preventing environmental degradation and safeguarding public health.

PLACE MATTERS Team Locations



Ultimately, we expect that PLACE MATTERS teams’ work will inform other local policies and practices to improve community conditions for health, as well as national practices. They will do so by:

- Identifying and assembling indicators of health status and community conditions in their target geographic areas;
- Building multi-sector community-based coalitions that include many key stakeholders, such as public health practitioners, faith and business leaders, grassroots organizations, elected officials, researchers, and others;
- Engaging new audiences through the news media, civic leaders, and others to build public support for mitigating adverse conditions; and,
- Promoting evidence-based policy solutions that help to reduce the concentration of health risks and increase health-enhancing resources, including those already present in vulnerable communities.

We expect this work to foster long-term improvements in the health of low-income communities and communities of color by highlighting the important role of neighborhood conditions in shaping health status and health inequities, by catalyzing local policy solutions, and by informing national activity to address social determinants of health.



**National Collaborative
for Health Equity**
Working with People, Partners, and Purpose

National Collaborative for Health Equity

1200 G St. NW, Suite 800 | Washington DC 20005 | 202-789-3500 (T) | 202-765-2400

For more information about PLACE MATTERS visit www.jointcenter.org/hpi/pages/place-matters