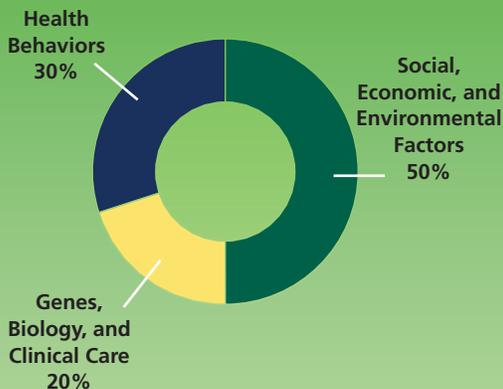


HEALTH EQUITY ZONES

Building healthy and resilient communities across Rhode Island



DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH



Based on frameworks developed by: Tarlov AR. *Ann N Y Acad Sci* 1999; 896: 281-93; and Kindig D, Asada Y, Booske B. *JAMA* 2008; 299(17):2081-2083.

Place matters when it comes to health.

It's a fact. Data show that nearby zip codes, or even adjacent neighborhoods, can often have striking differences in health outcomes. It's not just access to medical care that causes such differences. We spend an enormous amount on healthcare as a society, yet 80 percent of our health is determined outside the doctor's office and inside our homes, schools, jobs, and neighborhoods. To have the biggest impact on health outcomes – and help curb the rising cost of care – **first, we must shift our investments to the place where health happens the most: our communities.**

Research tells us that healthy communities have adequate transportation; employment opportunities; clean, safe, and affordable housing; parks and open space; access to fresh, healthy food and clean water; a high-quality education system; and safe streets. These are the best return on investment in health: places where people want to live, work, learn, and play.

The Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH)'s goal is to build healthy communities of opportunity in every corner of Rhode Island through our Health Equity Zone initiative.



Why Health Equity Matters

Health equity means everyone has the opportunity to live a healthy life – no matter who they are, where they live, or how much money they make. Equity is different from equality, which is achieved when everyone has equal access to resources. Achieving health equity requires understanding how community needs differ, and investing in the specific resources each community needs to give everyone a fair chance at good health.

When health equity exists, everyone benefits. Health outcomes get better, workplace productivity improves, and communities grow stronger and more resilient. When we do a better job keeping people healthy and preventing chronic disease, this also frees up money for communities to invest in priorities such as our schools and transportation systems – creating richer opportunities for all.

Health Equity Zones

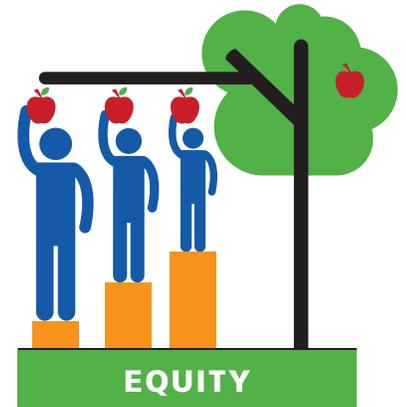
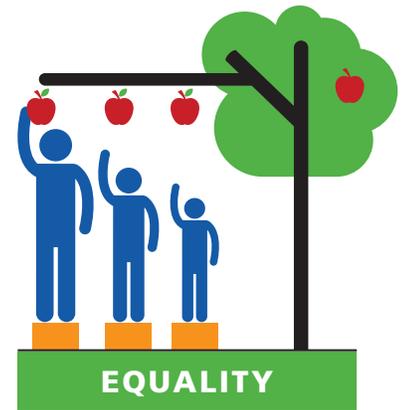
Rhode Island's Health Equity Zone initiative is an **innovative, place-based approach** that brings communities together to build the infrastructure needed to achieve healthy, systemic changes at the local level. Health Equity Zones are geographic areas where existing opportunities emerge and investments are made to address differences in health outcomes. Through a collaborative, community-led process, each Health Equity Zone conducts a needs assessment and implements a data-driven plan of action to address the unique social, economic, and environmental factors that are preventing people from being as healthy as possible.

Strong community development begins with authentic community engagement.

Strong Community Development

Rhode Island's Health Equity Zones **create a platform for neighbors and community partners to come together in new ways** and address the root causes of uneven health outcomes at the local level. Each Health Equity Zone is led by a collaborative that represents the diverse makeup of the community, including its residents.

Our approach recognizes that communities have different needs – and assets to build upon. By aligning strategic investments with existing resources across sectors, each community can address their unique needs, reduce disparities, and stimulate economic growth.



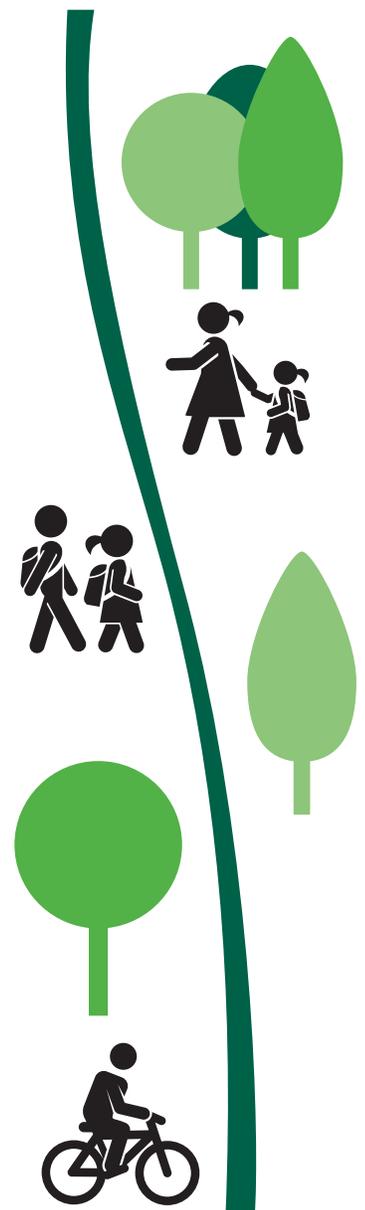
Equality doesn't mean equity.

Health Equity Zones engage the entire community to create solutions for issues people care about. Community leadership ensures actions are culturally and socially relevant, and sustainable.

Measurable, Sustainable Change Transforms Communities

Launched at an initial 11 sites throughout the state, Rhode Island's Health Equity Zone initiative is showing that **a concerted focus on people and place can have an immediate impact at the local level.**

- The Washington County Health Equity Zone has provided evidence-based mental health first aid and suicide prevention training to more than 1000 police officers, clergy, teachers, parents, and staff of youth-serving organizations, and has received federal funding to partner with local hospitals, community health centers, and residents to **screen all patients for depression** and support healthcare staff to **provide high-quality, timely, and evidence-based care** to patients at risk for suicide.
- The Pawtucket and Central Falls Health Equity Zone partnered with the City of Central Falls Planning Department to develop **Rhode Island's first Complete and Green Streets ordinance**, which is designed to ensure safe access to roadways for users of all ages and abilities and to protect the environment.
- The Olneyville Health Equity Zone helped its elementary school achieve **one of the highest attendance rates in the school district** by sponsoring a *Walking School Bus* program, where students can walk to school safely in the company of qualified adults.
- The Bristol Health Equity Zone facilitated the passage and implementation of a **town-wide ordinance banning cigarettes and vaping in all town parks**, ensuring access to smoke-free public spaces for all community members.
- The Newport Health Equity Zone partnered with the Newport Open Space Partnership and under-served communities – to **improve access to trees, parks, and recreation opportunities** – in the Newport Tree, Parks and Open Space Master Plan.
- The West Warwick Health Equity Zone embedded a behavioral health clinician within the local police department to **divert patients with substance misuse from the criminal justice system and into treatment**. The HEZ also partnered with the local high school to equip educators and staff to better address childhood traumatic stress.
- The Woonsocket and Bristol Health Equity Zones opened **free community drop-in centers for adults in recovery from substance use disorders**.
- The Southside, Elmwood, and West End Health Equity Zone in Providence **galvanized residents to advocate for housing as a social determinant of health**, achieving the remediation of several blighted properties, hosting a Neighborhood Housing Summit and advancing equitable housing policy.
- The City of Providence Health Equity Zone trained staff of 11 City recreation centers in implementing a **Healthy Eating policy**, to ensure healthy options and role modeling for City youth in all recreation centers.
- Health Equity Zones in Providence, Newport, West Warwick, Pawtucket, and Central Falls partnered to **train and deploy trusted community members as community health workers** to conduct needs assessments, identify safe routes to schools to improve attendance, promote recovery services, and build community-clinical linkages.
- To reduce high rates of unintended teen pregnancy, the Woonsocket Health Equity Zone **hired a Family Planning/Health Educator** who will implement a comprehensive, science-based curriculum at the high school during health class and link teens to the Title X school-based health center and after-school programs.



With the right investments, we can transform every community through a **Health Equity Zone**, putting better health, community development, and economic well-being in reach for all.

Action Plan

As part of its action plan, each Health Equity Zone evaluates progress towards measurable targets. Grant funding from RIDOH is intended to be an initial seed investment over a few years to build capacity and spark community development. **Communities need sustainable investments with flexible funding to drive lasting change.**

Once the existing Health Equity Zones have developed a strong community-based infrastructure to sustain their work, RIDOH and our partners will create the next cohort of Health Equity Zones.

A Unique Approach to Funding Public Health

Traditionally, public health departments have provided communities with separate sources of funding to implement specific programs or address specific health concerns, such as diabetes or cancer. Rhode Island's Health Equity Zone initiative **braids together funds from several sources**, so that communities can work together to achieve shared goals for sustained community health and economic well-being.

Rhode Island is the first in the nation to adopt this innovative funding approach at the statewide level, which could serve as a national model for transforming public health by scaling up from the community level.

How to Get Involved

Health Equity Zones are RIDOH's signature initiative, demonstrating our commitment to sustainable, measurable, comprehensive community development. We encourage everyone to **become part of this movement**. There are many ways to get involved, from strategic investments to policy change and support for community-led processes.

Here are ways you can support the Health Equity Zone initiative:

- Invest in existing Health Equity Zones to help them sustain their work.
- Partner with RIDOH to provide seed funding for a new Health Equity Zone.
- Become a "backbone" organization and provide the infrastructure for a new Health Equity Zone.
- Require policies that fund infrastructure and action steps for Health Equity Zones and similar place-based strategies.
- Mandate that all place-based strategies are funded and implemented for the community, by the community, respectively.
- Fund a cross-cutting focus area through RIDOH to distribute across Health Equity Zones – such as substance use disorder, healthy food access, clean street policies, transportation improvements, and employment opportunities.

If your organization is interested in supporting this model, contact Ana Novais, RIDOH Executive Director, at 401-222-5117 or Ana.Novais@health.ri.gov.

