

Principles into Practice

Partner Role

Supported by the **Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**, *Raising the Bar* provides an actionable framework for the entire healthcare sector to embed equity and excellence throughout its work. In this first part of the project the **National Alliance to impact the Social Determinants of Health** (NASDOH) convened extensive discussions with providers, hospitals, payers, and community leaders to develop foundational principles, essential roles, and concrete actions for the sector to help achieve optimal health for all. A second part, led by the National Partnership for Women & Families, is exploring more detailed guidance for maternal health.

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Principles into Practice:

Partner Role

Raising the Bar's five principles provide the foundation for transformational action by healthcare payers, providers, and other organizations. *Raising the Bar* describes four essential roles played by healthcare, providing a framework for how the principles can be put into practice.

This section focuses on healthcare's role as a PARTNER, including the essential role payers and other organizations play in facilitating the provision of healthcare, and outlines concrete actions, each with a commitment that healthcare can make to advance equity and excellence, and a set of tactical strategies.

Following the Roles and Actions, there are a set of vignettes which highlight examples of organizations already advancing efforts in line with those actions outlined in the PARTNER role. There is also a set of resources for healthcare stakeholders looking for a place to begin or to amplify ongoing work in this role area. An aggregated set of the *Raising the Bar* [Resources](#) is available.

PARTNER ROLE

Engage with Individuals and Organizations in the Community, Prioritizing Those Most Affected by Inequities

Communities thrive—and healthcare delivery is more effective—when healthcare meaningfully involves communities; respects and centers their expertise, needs, and priorities in governance and decision-making; and works in partnership with individuals and organizations in the community on activities and initiatives that reflect that engagement and their role as a partner.

Healthcare's Actions

Action 8 **Meaningfully involve individuals from the community in governance and decision-making.**

Healthcare's Commitment

Provide for robust representation and continued involvement of individuals from the areas in which organizations work—particularly those with the greatest health challenges. Create meaningful decision-making roles for individuals from the community, emphasizing involvement with those with lived experience of inequity, to collaborate on the strategy for and priorities of the healthcare organization or institution. Invest in structures that facilitate success and mitigate barriers that inhibit full participation—for example, by providing fair compensation.

Why this action is included

Individuals from the community bring deep understanding of the needs, priorities, and aspirations of those with the greatest barriers to optimal health and well-being, and expertise on solutions to challenges faced by the community. Diverse voices in governance and management ensure that the organization's goals, priorities, and initiatives will reflect the needs and priorities of the diverse communities it serves. Healthcare organizations of all sizes and types should seek the valuable input of individuals from the community.

Putting this action into practice

- Meaningfully involve community members, reflecting the diversity of the community, in governance and at all levels of decision-making regarding strategies, policies, and practices. Community input can help shape an organizational culture that can meet the community's needs and priorities. Such opportunities can be reflected through a variety of means, ranging from engagement in committees and leadership of specific initiatives to membership on boards of directors or other governing bodies. Providing advice or participating in advisory bodies by itself does not constitute meaningful involvement.
- Provide support for community members' effective engagement, including compensation for time and expertise and the removal of language, transportation, and other barriers to their full participation.

Action 9 **Build trusting relationships with individuals and organizations in the community.**

Healthcare's Commitment

Earn and sustain trust with community-based organizations, agencies, and individuals by actively fostering long-term, collaborative partnerships that benefit the places and individuals served.

Why this action is included

Healthcare is one sector within the broader, interconnected ecosystem that impacts health in any neighborhood or broader community. To raise the bar for equity and excellence, organizations must build authentic and enduring partnerships with individuals and organizations located in the community, based on dignity and respect for each other's perspectives. These partnerships require investment of time, attention, and resources in partnership with the community for the benefit of that community.

Putting this action into practice

- Integrate respect for community expertise into organizational culture and make long-term investments in relationships with community organizations and residents.
- Develop an understanding of how to effectively partner with communities and build the internal capacity to facilitate those partnerships. This includes identifying what connections and expertise exist already and employing staff whose primary function is to connect and build partnerships with community partners.
- Create systems and processes that ensure accountability for steps needed to provide for a community engagement strategy and community-focused initiatives.
- Collaborate regularly with local leaders to understand their work, explore opportunities for collective impact, and determine the most appropriate role for healthcare.
- Meet with residents to understand how the community defines its own needs, assets, and priorities, and co-design initiatives to address health priorities.

- Create opportunities for community leaders to present to leadership within the healthcare organization or institution. This allows healthcare leaders to learn from the community directly and communicates respect for the communities' knowledge and skill.
- Acknowledge the lack of equity in both society and the healthcare system, healthcare's role in perpetuating inequities, and the importance of proactive steps to eliminate racism and all discrimination in healthcare.

Action 10 **Respect and build on the expertise and power of individuals and organizations in the community.**

Healthcare's Commitment

Work with individuals and representatives of organizations from neighborhoods and communities where healthcare institutions are located to understand their priorities, strengths and assets, health and well-being needs, and priorities. Work collaboratively to identify opportunities and support activities in the community that reflect those self-identified needs and priorities in order to help build the power and capacity of community organizations to meet them.

Why this action is included

Communities are rich in experience, skills, and history; this expertise needs to be acknowledged, celebrated, and invested in.

In particular, individuals in the community who have experienced the greatest barriers and inequities are experts in their own needs and priorities. Alongside leaders and organizations who represent and/or provide services to the community, engaged stakeholders can identify the unique impact of structural and systemic inequities specific to the area. Healthcare providers, payers, and other organizations who want to raise the bar for equity and excellence should listen to these voices first and invest in their leadership.

Putting this action into practice

- Elevate the role of individuals and advocates, facilitating a move from low engagement or consultation to partnership and community leadership as a means of effective engagement.
- Open doors for and support development of community leaders and seek opportunities where community leaders and organizations can gain greater visibility and access to others who influence decision-making.
- Create opportunities for community partners to lead and receive recognition.
- Establish a balance of decision-making power in partnerships and ensure that community partners have real decision-making roles including on the use of funding.
- Work in solidarity with community members to address their self-identified needs, interests, and priorities.
- Rethink the traditional community health assessment approach and engage with public health partners, other institutions, and community stakeholders to more rigorously obtain input and identify opportunities for collective action.
- Understand the existing initiatives in the community and contribute to those efforts instead of creating new initiatives. Share financial resources and fairly compensate community residents and organizations.
- Pursue collaborative partnerships with public health agencies, building on their experience in community-wide health initiatives, surveillance, and policy.
- Invest in further development of community organizations or provide resources to build them where they do not exist.
- Share knowledge and support the capacity of community organizations and individuals to succeed independent of the direct benefit to healthcare.

Partner Role: Vignettes

HOPE Clinic

Strong community partnerships provide the strength to improve the well-being of a multi-cultural community. HOPE Clinic, a large Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) in the Greater Houston area, has centered community partnerships in its work since 2002 when it started out as a volunteer-run organization.

[HOPE Clinic](#) embraces its ability to meet the varied needs of the diverse communities it serves, where residents speak 30 languages and over 60 dialects. The Clinic forges strong community relationships to provide comprehensive, linguistically, and culturally appropriate care and services for all across their lifetime.

Through collaboration with community-based organizations, HOPE Clinic understands the health needs of its diverse patient base and provides [numerous programs](#) based on what they see and hear from their partners.

As HOPE CEO, Andrea Caracostis sees it, “Health centers tend to want to do everything for everybody, especially when it comes to social determinants of health and patients’ social needs. In my opinion, what’s more important is to build a community that is really strong. To build that, you need to help your partners become strong. We are only as strong as our weakest link.”

HOPE Clinic begins by finding others in the community that share an idea or vision for change that is informed by provider observations and community-identified priorities. Particularly when building programs that will have long-term, community-wide impact, HOPE Clinic seeks partnerships that will address upstream contributors to health issues and expand capacity to provide culturally appropriate services.

When HOPE Clinic set out to empower and teach communities to make healthy food and lifestyle choices, it saw an opportunity to improve the economic well-being of small businesses at the same time. HOPE Clinic brought local organizations together to create [A Bite of HOPE](#). The partnered effort focused on transforming the food landscape in the Houston area. During COVID-19, a central focus was to encourage healthy eating while also helping small businesses survive. HOPE Clinic and their partners connected restaurant owners to clinical providers to help them understand the roles they each play in the community, and how they could combine to improve health. A Bite of Hope provided small businesses with business and culinary training and encouraged them to update their menus with healthier versions of local favorites and comfort foods. The program also provided virtual cooking classes for families and seniors, often in tandem with their Food Rx program, teaching community members how to make healthier choices in a culturally cognizant way.

HOPE Clinic partners with capacity-building in mind, emphasizing bidirectional engagement. Andrea Caracostis shares that community partnerships are like best friends. They are there for each other when needed. Given limited resources in the community, HOPE Clinic has always encouraged agencies and organizations to work cohesively and support each other rather than compete for funding.

For HOPE Clinic, the key to fostering symbiotic relationships with other organizations and agencies in the community is acknowledging these organizations as stakeholders—engaging them in strategic planning and community needs assessments to intentionally work together. Moreover, willingness to listen and explore new ideas, find common ground, and connect organizations has promoted positive community relationships.

Cleveland Clinic

Cleveland Clinic is a nonprofit academic medical center that serves beneficiaries in Ohio, Nevada, Florida, London, and Canada. To better meet the needs of its varied patient communities, especially those most affected by inequities, Cleveland Clinic partners with community residents and organizations.

At the beginning of COVID, the faith community in Cleveland struggled with whether it could hold socially distanced services safely. Seeing their patients wrestle with this, Cleveland Clinic partnered with leaders in the faith community to create a forum where clinical experts, counselors, therapists, and community members could come together to discuss the latest information on the virus, and strategies for safely socially distancing without emotionally distancing. The small program grew quickly and helped congregations across 12 states develop strategies to meet their congregations' needs during the pandemic. By respecting the needs, expertise, and power of individuals in the community—and recognizing their desire to hold safe services during a pandemic—Cleveland Clinic was able to effectively serve as a trustworthy resource.

When biomedical researchers at the Cleveland Clinic sought to increase participation of people of color in their research, they knew they would have to overcome the community's long held distrust of medical institutions. That distrust is a major reason why communities of color historically have not been well-represented in medical research, and partially why health inequity persists. Recognizing this but wanting to increase participation of communities of color, Cleveland Clinic sought guidance from local faith leaders on how to build trust. That partnership enabled them to better understand the concerns and needs of the community. It also provided a way to communicate why they were asking people to participate in biomedical research, and the importance of more diverse participants. The partnership generated trust in the community and increased the diversity of the research pool.

Nationwide Children's Hospital

Nationwide Children's Hospital is an acute care teaching pediatric hospital that sees over 1.5 million patients each year. While the hospital serves families from across the nation and the globe, many of their patients come from their surrounding neighborhood in the South Side of Columbus, Ohio.

Though culturally rich and racially diverse, the South Side has faced a long history of disenfranchisement. The Great Recession exacerbated pre-existing socioeconomic issues, including blight and poor housing conditions. Recognizing the toll that poor housing was taking on the health of its community members, Nationwide Children's Hospital partnered with Community Development for All People (CD4AP), a local faith-based community development organization that had been providing safe and affordable housing for South Side residents for several years. Together, they created the Healthy Neighborhoods, Healthy Families Realty Collaborative, which is owned by CD4AP and housed within Nationwide Children's Hospital. During the first few years of their joint venture, they rehabilitated and repaired homes within a 38-block area to the immediate south and east of the Hospital's main campus. The number of vacant properties has since declined by over 90 percent and their partnership has continued to grow.

Over the course of their 14-year relationship, the two organizations have shared common goals, forged trust and mutual respect for one another, and combined their complementary strengths for greater impact. CD4A is a community-centered organization with deep ties to the neighborhood and critical local expertise. Nationwide Children's Hospital is a well-resourced, nationally recognized partner with economic resources—including infrastructure, political capital, and capacity—to help secure affordable housing tax credits necessary to the success of their initiatives. Together, they've renovated and built several dozen homes, provided an additional several dozen homeowners with grants for exterior home improvements, and have become landlords at scale to ensure that safe and high-quality homes can continue to be rented at below market rate (and therefore remain affordable for people with low income). Their ultimate goal is to create a sustainable, mixed-income community.

Early findings suggest that the Healthy Neighborhoods, Healthy Families community development initiatives may be associated with a modest decline in high-cost healthcare utilization among children. While the formal evaluation is still underway, their work to date—including an expansion into a second neighborhood—demonstrates what is possible when hospitals build trusting relationships and invest in their neighborhoods.

Learn more about this [initiative](#) and its [impact](#).

Partner Role: Resources

Advancing Resilience & Community Health

Nonprofit Finance Fund (2021)

- The Advancing Resilience & Community Health (ARCH) project was designed to help burgeoning relationships between healthcare institutions (payers and hospital systems) and community-based organizations (CBOs) get off the ground successfully and at a scale that could make a difference.

Aligning Systems for Health

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (n.d.)

- Aligning Systems for Health focuses on identifying, testing, and sharing what works to align healthcare, public health, and social services to better address the goals and needs of the people and communities they serve. It includes a resource library with case studies, webinar postings, and other publications.

Building Effective Health System-Community Partnerships: Lessons from the Field

Center for Health Care Strategies (2021)

- This brief shares considerations for healthcare organizations and government entities seeking to build effective partnerships with the individuals and communities they serve to better address their health and social needs.

Community Health Assessment Toolkit

AHA Community Health Improvement (2017)

- This toolkit offers a nine-step pathway for conducting a community health assessment and developing implementation strategies.

Convening a Consumer Advisory Board: Key Considerations and Best Practices Infographic

Center for Health Care Strategies (2019)

- This piece and accompanying infographic from the Center for Health Care Strategies provides guidance to healthcare systems about how to create successful consumer advisory boards. Consumer advisory boards ensure that healthcare systems can better understand priority health issues and improve care delivery to the individuals and communities they serve.

Engaging People with Lived Experience Toolkit

Community Commons (2019)

- This toolkit was developed to help conveners effectively engage people with lived experience of a core issue and/or inequity to create lasting community transformation.

Engaging People with Lived/Living Experience

Tamarack Institute (2019)

- This practical guide to engaging people with lived/living experience was written to support the social justice and human rights imperative that people with lived/living experience of poverty must be included as equal partners in the development, implementation, and evaluation of solutions that affect their lives.

Ensuring Access in Vulnerable Communities: Community Conversations Toolkit

American Hospital Association (2017)

- This toolkit is designed to help organizations begin to engage in discussions related to the healthcare services offered in their communities. It provides ways to broadly engage communities through community conversation events, social media, and use of the community health assessment. The toolkit outlines strategies to focus engagement on specific stakeholders such as patients, boards, and clinicians.

Guide: Engaging Patients and Communities in the Community Health Needs Assessment Process

American Hospital Association, Health Research & Educational Trust (n.d.)

- This guide provides a framework for hospitals to launch their community health improvement efforts and engaging patients and community members throughout the process makes the community health needs assessment more powerful for hospitals and the communities they serve.

Inclusion: The Starting Point for Effective Teams

Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (2021)

- This resource outlines strategies for effective stakeholder engagement, especially regarding trust and inclusivity.

Lessons Learned from Partnerships Between Networks of Community-Based Organizations and Healthcare Organizations

Nonprofit Finance Fund (2021)

- This brief highlights themes and lessons learned through the ARCH initiative, designed to help networks of nonprofit community-based organizations develop new contracts, payment models, and partnership approaches with healthcare payers to achieve better health outcomes across the United States.

One-Stop Shop for Healthcare & Community Partnerships

HealthBegins and Nonprofit Finance Fund (2019)

- This resource provides tools for healthcare and social service partners to demonstrate financial and social returns for healthcare and social service partnerships.

Oregon's Rapid Engagement Pilot: Engaging People with Lived Experience in System Change Co-Design

The Delta Center (2021)

- This library of resources details the Rapid Engagement Pilot in Oregon and includes a summary of consumer input for the pilot and a brief lesson learned from engaging people with lived experience in co-design of the pilot. Rapid Engagement is a system transformation project with the goal of making it easier, faster, and more user-friendly for people to get started with receiving outpatient behavioral health services and uses a trauma-informed and person-centered approach to behavioral health access.

Person Centered Engagement at the Organizational Level

Center for Consumer Engagement in Health Innovation, Community Catalyst, Health Care Transformation Task Force (2020)

- This resource is a guide for leaders and staff at healthcare organizations to aid in developing meaningful person-centered engagement structures at the organizational level. It is informed by a review of literature on consumer engagement and case studies from healthcare organizations that have made commitments to engaging patients and families at the organizational level.



**Raising
the Bar**
Healthcare's Transforming Role

2022