

Taking Action to Raise the Bar

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# Public Health Organizations

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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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# Public Health Organizations

## Public health entities are critical to the *Raising the Bar* mission

To truly achieve equity and excellence in healthcare, collaboration across sectors is necessary to ensure that all aspects of individuals' and communities' health and well-being are adequately addressed. Public health organizations, including governmental public health agencies, public health institutes, and individual practitioners, have a wealth of experience in community engagement, advocating for and leading prevention efforts, and serving as a respected conveners that can support the health system's transformation toward one that values and rewards health equity and incentivizes delivery models that respond to *Raising the Bar's* principles.

As with other stakeholders, this starts with an organizational commitment to a mission of improving health and well-being, and institutionalizing health equity as part of their organizational strategy. These commitments need to be executed through a diverse, sustainable, and well-supported workforce. Organizations of all sizes can adopt strategies for how they engage with and support communities through procurement, investment, and power sharing. The transformational roles and actions laid out in *Raising the Bar* provide a unique opportunity for public health to further engage with healthcare in advancing equity, developing collaborative programmatic and advocacy strategies to improve funding for upstream prevention, and deepen relationships with local communities.

## Public health organizations have unique roles and responsibilities

State and local public health agencies, public health institutes, and others who engage in prevention and population health efforts also have unique opportunities and responsibilities. The following priority initiatives draw from the 14 actions included in *Raising the Bar*.

### 1) Agency culture and operations

Many of *Raising the Bar's* actions apply to the culture and operations of public health agencies themselves.

- Establish and sustain a trusting environment where everyone feels they are welcomed and treated with dignity and respect. Many public health agencies provide direct care to individuals (for example, as they conduct screenings, deliver vaccines and other preventive services, and conduct contact tracing).
- Invest in and grow leaders who advance and embed equity, quality, and value across the organization.
- Employ and cultivate a workforce at all levels that is representative of the community to ensure that community members are served effectively.
- Leverage procurement to ensure the diversity and well-being of contract workers and use public resources to help build the economic sustainability of communities. Public health organizations can establish diversity-focused criteria in grant opportunities to community-based organizations and analyze internal practices to identify and address implicit or explicit racist policies.

## 2) Engagement with the community

Public health agencies are uniquely positioned to facilitate engagement with the community and collective action by all stakeholders in a jurisdiction.

- Extend community engagements beyond standard practices, such as community health needs assessments, to involve individuals from the community in governance and decision-making.
- Public health leadership can play a significant role in healthcare's efforts to build trusting, sustained relationships with individuals and organizations in the community. Playing a role similar to a chief health strategist, public health organizations can take the lead in building community coalitions to facilitate the development of meaningful relations between healthcare, community members, local organizations, and other stakeholders to advance equity and tackle systemic issues.<sup>1</sup>

## 3) Engagement with healthcare stakeholders

Public health-healthcare partnerships are critical to advancing population health goals and achieving health equity.

- Use *Raising the Bar* as a prompt for further action in partnership with hospitals and healthcare systems to improve cross-institution planning and bolster data sharing. Foster an environment where collective action can be taken by all stakeholders with a vested interest in the health and well-being of communities to address the underlying social and economic factors that influence individuals' health.
- Actively support local healthcare systems engaged in payment and delivery reform. Public health organizations can be a natural partner for healthcare systems as they transition from episodic care to a model that emphasizes upstream prevention efforts. As healthcare systems develop new interventions to improve the social determinants of health of their local community, there will be greater recognition for the need to bolster public health funding as part of payment reform. While *Raising the Bar* is geared towards healthcare organizations, it will take a collective, multi-sector effort to achieve optimal well-being for those who face the greatest barriers to health.
- Leverage healthcare systems' power and influence to further advocate for health equity in the development and implementation of public policies. Similar to a "health in all policies" strategy, public health can ally with healthcare stakeholders to support, advocate, and advance health promoting policies that are beneficial to communities' health.
- Seek opportunities to partner with healthcare to shape public understanding about the importance of health equity and dismantling racism and all forms of discrimination. Public health organizations can leverage their relationships with community members and organizations to support healthcare systems' efforts to amplify messaging on the importance of addressing racism.

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<sup>1</sup> Prev Chronic Dis. 2017 Sep 7;14:E78. doi: 10.5888/pcd14.170017. Public Health 3.0: A Call to Action for Public Health to Meet the Challenges of the 21st Century

# Resources for Public Health Organizations That Want to Raise the Bar

The resources below highlight steps public health agencies can take in their primary roles—addressing community and population-wide systems and policies. These agencies also have important roles in delivering services to individuals; resources for how *Raising the Bar* Principles can be applied to this role can be found in the stakeholder guides focusing on practitioners and hospitals and healthcare systems. To see the full set of *Raising the Bar* resources, visit the [Resources chapter](#).

## **[Aligning Systems for Health](#)**

Georgia Health Policy Center

- 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.

## **[6I18 Initiative](#)**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

- CDC is collaborating with partners—like healthcare providers, public health workers, insurers, and employers who purchase insurance—to improve health and control healthcare costs by: giving partners rigorous evidence about high-burden health conditions and related interventions; highlighting disease-prevention interventions to increase their coverage, use, and quality; and aligning proven preventive practices with value-based ways of paying for healthcare.

## **[Better Care Playbook](#)**

Center for Health Care Strategies

- This online resource center provides healthcare stakeholders with the best available knowledge about promising approaches to improve care for people with complex needs and spread best practices.

## **[Social Determinants of Health Accelerator Plans](#)**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

- The CDC's Closing the Gap With Social Determinants of Health Accelerator Plans funds 20 recipients to help accelerate actions in state, local, tribal, and territorial jurisdictions that prevent and reduce chronic diseases among people experiencing health disparities.

## **[Countering the Production of Health Inequities through Systems and Sectors](#)**

Prevention Institute (2018)

- This resource offers an analysis of the contributing factors of health inequities and presents a three-pronged systems solution to addressing these inequities.

## **[Healthy Communities Policy Framework](#)**

Healthcare Anchor Network (2020)

- This resource provides a framework for a policy agenda to create equitable, engaged, connected and economically strong communities.

### **Integrator Role and Functions in Population Health Improvement Initiatives**

Nemours (2012)

- This resource describes the role of an integrator—an entity that serves a convening role and works intentionally and systematically across various sectors to achieve improvements in health and well-being—and outlines the goals of an integrator or system of integrators. The paper proposes eleven integrative roles and functions that a range of partners within population health networks must play to ensure that their efforts have the best opportunity for achieving their population-level health goals.

### **Principles for Building Healthy and Prosperous Communities**

Build Healthy Places Network (2020)

- The Build Healthy Places Network created this list of five principles to encourage work across sectors in low-income communities to improve health and wellbeing. These principles were developed through a review of mission statements and principles from organizations representing the community development, health, academic, government, finance, and philanthropic sectors. The principles are meant to frame and guide efforts across sectors working toward achieving an equitable future.

### **Public Health 3.0: A Call to Action for Public Health to Meet the Challenges of the 21st Century**

National Library of Medicine, National Center for Biotechnology and Information, NIH (2017)

- This resource, co-authored by Karen DeSalvo, Y Claire Wang, Andrea Harris, John Auerbach, Denise Koo, and Patrick O'Carroll offers an overview of the Public Health 3.0 model in which local leaders serve as Chief Health Strategists, partnering across multiple sectors and leveraging data and resources to address social, environmental, and economic conditions that affect health and health equity.



**Raising  
the Bar**

Healthcare's Transforming Role