



PLACE MATTERS

PLACE MATTERS is a national initiative of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, Health Policy Institute (HPI; www.jointcenter.org) designed to improve the health of participating communities by addressing social conditions that lead to poor health. As of July 2007, our national learning community consists of 16 PLACE MATTERS Teams responsible for designing and implementing strategies that address the social determinants of health impacting residents in 21 counties and 3 cities. HPI provides technical assistance to participating Teams in the forms of facilitation, Design Lab meetings that include national level experts and peer-to-peer learning opportunities, technical assistance grants, and access to data.

The Joint Center HPI approach to reducing/eliminating health disparities involves identifying the complex underlying causes of health disparities and defining strategies to address these root causes. A growing body of research clearly supports the notion that interventions targeting the social determinants of health can indeed modify patterns of health, illness, and health disparities. **Addressing upstream causes of health (e.g., employment, education, poverty, housing, etc.) through action and policy development and measuring the indicators associated with social determinants of health are at the heart of our PLACE MATTERS work.** With generous funding provided by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the PLACE MATTERS Initiative attempts to address these social determinants through the work of the participating Teams.

What are Social Determinants of Health?

Social conditions are major determinants of health. Social forces acting at a collective level shape individual biology, individual risk behaviors, environmental exposures, and access to resources that promote health. There is a graded relationship between social position and health status that affects people at all levels of the social hierarchy. While public health programs alone cannot ameliorate the social forces that are associated with poor health outcomes, developing a better understanding of the social determinants of health is critical to reducing health disparities among Washington State residents of differing socioeconomic position.

From *The Health of Washington State: The Social Determinants of Health*. 2002.

To date, HPI has invited many resource partners to join us on this important journey, including but not limited to: The California Endowment, the National Association of Counties (NACo), the National Organization of Black County Officials (NOBCO), the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), and the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. The Joint Center HPI contracts with CommonHealth ACTION (www.commonhealthaction.org) to develop and implement the Design Lab learning experiences and to provide technical assistance to PLACE MATTERS participants.

Participating Counties and Cities:

- Alameda County, CA
- Baltimore, MD
- Bernalillo County, NM
- Boston, MA
- Cook County, IL
- Cuyahoga County, OH
- Jefferson County, AL
- King County, WA
- Marlboro County, SC
- Mid-Mississippi Delta Counties: Coahoma, Washington, & Sunflower, MS
- Orleans Parish, LA
- Prince George's County, MD
- San Joaquin Valley Counties: Fresno, Kern, Kings, Merced, Madera, & Tulare, CA
- Sharkey-Issaquena Counties, MS
- Wayne County, MI
- Washington, DC

For additional information regarding this initiative, please contact HPI Deputy Director Gina E. Wood (gwood@jointcenter.org).