

NIH Launches Community-Led Research Program to Advance Health Equity

Awards to community organizations will enable examination of structural drivers of health.

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The National Institutes of Health is funding a first-of-its-kind community-led research program to study ways to address the underlying structural factors within communities that affect health, such as access to safe spaces, healthy food, employment opportunities, transportation, and quality health care.

Through the NIH Common Fund Community Partnerships to Advance Science for Society (ComPASS) program, NIH made 26 awards to community organizations and a coordinating center, totaling approximately \$171 million over five years, pending the availability of funds. Through these awards, ComPASS will enable research into sustainable solutions that promote health equity to create lasting change in communities across the nation.

NIH is directly funding research projects led by community organizations. Leaders from the organizations will work in collaboration with their research partners at academic institutions and other organizations in all phases of the research process. ComPASS projects study social determinants of health — the social, physical, and economic conditions where people are born, grow, live, work, age, and play — that contribute to health inequities.

“The ComPASS research model harnesses diverse perspectives and expertise to examine systemic factors that impact the health of individuals, communities, and populations,” said NIH Acting Director Lawrence Tabak, DDS, PhD. “We are excited to see how results from these awards exemplify the transformative power of community-driven research.”

[The projects](#) will examine underlying conditions and environments that influence health outcomes by enabling the development, implementation, and assessment of structural interventions. Structural interventions are meant to alter social determinants of health by changing factors that create differences in opportunities to achieve optimal health.

Each award will foster the design of strategies to improve health outcomes through innovative structural interventions to address community concerns, such as economic development, social

and community context, neighborhood characteristics, health care access and quality, and nutrition and food environment. Community organizations and their research partners will work together to develop a structural intervention, launch it within their communities, and then assess whether the intervention improves health outcomes.

Several examples of ComPASS-supported research projects, which focus on populations that , include:

- Supporting access to healthy food in underserved rural communities through the delivery of food boxes to local stores and individuals, and facilitating local food harvesting, processing, and distribution in the community. The project will measure whether these interventions reduce hunger, improve diet quality, promote healthy weight, and protect people against chronic diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease.
- Assessing whether early childcare strategies improve mental health for children and their parents and guardians. This project will develop and examine community strategies that increase access to public early childcare, education, and programming to support young children and families in areas with limited access to childcare.
- Enhancing access to health care through individualized travel information and resources along with a transportation stipend for health care and related trips. The project will assess whether improved transportation access can reduce emergency department readmissions and secondary infections, decrease hospital costs, and improve disease management.
- Improving access to quality health care for older adults from sexual and gender minority populations by creating culturally appropriate and inclusive protocols in the local health system. The project will measure how these changes in the local health system affect overall physical and mental health.
- Assessing whether enhancing telehealth models in rural communities can improve preventative screening and disease management for cancer, depression, diabetes, high blood pressure, and other chronic diseases among agricultural workers. The project will improve telehealth by transforming the workers' access to affordable, reliable high-speed broadband internet.

NIH will gain valuable experience and insight into how to support successful future community-led health research. Each project will also contribute valuable data to a growing body of knowledge

about social determinants of health and structural inequities.

The ComPASS program is funded by the NIH Common Fund and managed collaboratively by NIH staff from the Common Fund; National Cancer Institute; National Institute of Mental Health; National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities; National Institute of Nursing Research; National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute; and NIH Office of Research on Women's Health, with many of the NIH Institutes Centers and Offices providing input and participating in program development and management.

More information is available on the ComPASS program website: <https://commonfund.nih.gov/compass>.

To learn more about ComPASS, watch this brief video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVQVYQBh6KM>

About the NIH Common Fund: The NIH Common Fund encourages collaboration and supports a series of exceptionally high-impact, NIH-wide programs. Common Fund programs are managed by the Office of Strategic Coordination in the Division of Program Coordination, Planning, and Strategic Initiatives in the NIH Office of the Director in partnership with the NIH Institutes, Centers, and Offices. More information is available at the Common Fund website: <https://commonfund.nih.gov>.

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