

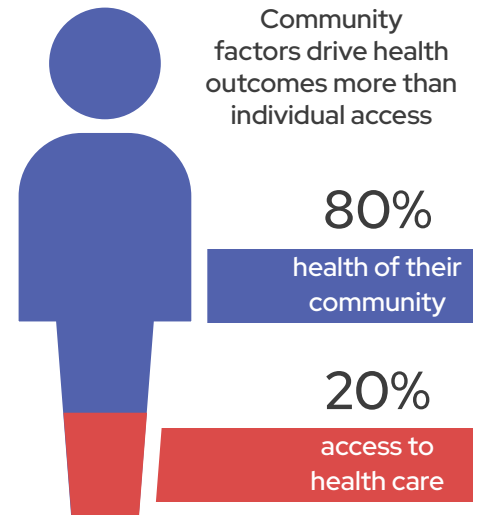


Building Your Legacy

Public Health Investments with a High Return

Public health promotes health and well-being at the population level rather than treating individual patients. Where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age – known as the social determinants of health – has a greater impact on health outcomes than how often one goes to the doctor. With **20% of a person's health being determined by access to health care, the other 80% is driven by the health of their community.**

Not all public health interventions are created equally. Below are examples of investments that can transform community health and produce strong returns on investment for local economies.



Housing

Strategies that improve the quality of housing, increase housing access, and reduce homelessness are critical to community health.

People with stable housing are more likely to have **better health, higher community participation, higher education and increased employment.** In contrast, housing stress – often brought on by insufficient, poor-quality, or unaffordable housing – is also associated with **lower mental health** and higher rates of **substance use.**

Increasing access to high-quality, affordable housing, therefore, can improve health and strengthen the local workforce and economy. Policies such as **legal support for renters** and **affordable housing trusts** help increase housing access in a community. See NACo's **Advancing Local Housing Affordability: Best Practice and Policy Recommendations for County Leaders** for more ways that counties can improving housing in their communities.

Education

Adults with higher levels of education have [better health](#) outcomes and longer lifespans than their peers. This, in turn, impacts economic output, in addition to individual factors like socioeconomic status and housing access.

Expanding access to early childhood education is one way that county officials can improve education in their communities. [High quality, accessible pre-K programs](#) lead to increased high school graduation rates, greater earnings, and improved physical and mental health outcomes. Investing in quality education ultimately benefits the local economy by building the future workforce.

Air & Water Quality

The air people breathe and the water they drink have significant implications for their short- and long-term health. Air pollution has been linked to [cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, and cancer](#). Similarly, unsafe levels of contaminants in drinking water can lead to [gastrointestinal illnesses, nervous system or reproductive effects, and chronic diseases such as cancer](#).

Unfortunately, most of the water and wastewater infrastructure in the U.S. is [insufficient and aging](#), and communities have varying access to clean water and exposure to air pollution. Improving air and water quality in a community can reduce the burden of these diseases, leading to a healthier, more productive workforce.

Complete Streets

Public and active transportation like walking and biking improves air quality and encourages positive health behaviors that promote health and well-being. Historically, U.S. transportation policy has [emphasized roads](#) over public and active transportation. Inadequate transportation infrastructure can deter county residents from using active transportation or make walking, bicycling, or using a wheelchair unsafe. Further, people who live near highways or other transportation facilities are exposed to unsafe air quality and are more likely to experience [health issues like asthma](#).



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