

## **Our Priorities**

### **Maine Alliance of Health and Prosperity**

#### **Equitable Housing Options**

Maine's housing crisis has emerged as one of the state's biggest problems, limiting employment opportunities for workers, wreaking havoc on the healthcare system, and challenging the state's economy. The COVID pandemic caused an already fragile and under-resourced housing market to crumble.

The Alliance's Housing Workgroup identified problems and solutions needed in five key areas – homelessness, housing affordability, special needs, first-time home ownership and dwelling conditions. Using relevant and compelling data and stories about real people and places across Maine that are bearing the brunt of these issues, the Workgroup is focused on spurring action to help address and ultimately, resolve the crisis.

Municipal governments, business leaders and the state Legislature are calling for creative, practical and feasible solutions, but efforts to convene and catalyze cross-sector initiatives to meet complex and multiple needs (affordable housing close to childcare and housing for elders with accessibility features, for example) are far too few.

A recently funded statewide approach (citation: Maine Homeless System Redesign, Center Supportive Housing, 2021) to developing strategies to end homelessness in Maine aims to buck this trend. Nine regional hubs, funded by MaineHousing are using Federal grant dollars to support work with groups of community-based organizations, local government, health care, faith leaders and others to implement strategies that reflect regional needs and resources.

#### **Multisector Hubs Create Efficiencies and Improve Access**

Most blueprints for Maine's future vitality depend on the existence of community-level capacity for convening, planning, coordinating, and evaluating, which often take the form of virtual or physical organizational hubs.

Many recently published reports highlight the benefits of this concept in plans for economic growth, climate adaptation, public health, emergency response, health care, lifelong learning, transportation, and housing, among others. National models for health and prosperity offer

similar visions for community-level, multi-sector partnerships that can produce meaningful community change.

The Alliance is highlighting the concept of hubs because it is an on-the-ground demonstration of the importance of cultivating cross-sector relationships and shared approaches to problem-solving. Hubs also allow a ready-made platform for governmental and philanthropic funders to collaborate through shared funding for projects and programs. Currently, there are several examples of hubs in Maine (e.g., regional Councils of Government, Maine West, Healthy Acadia) but they are not widely dispersed around the state. For Maine to achieve true improvements in health and prosperity, all citizens should have the opportunity to easily-accessed, cross or multisector approaches and interventions.

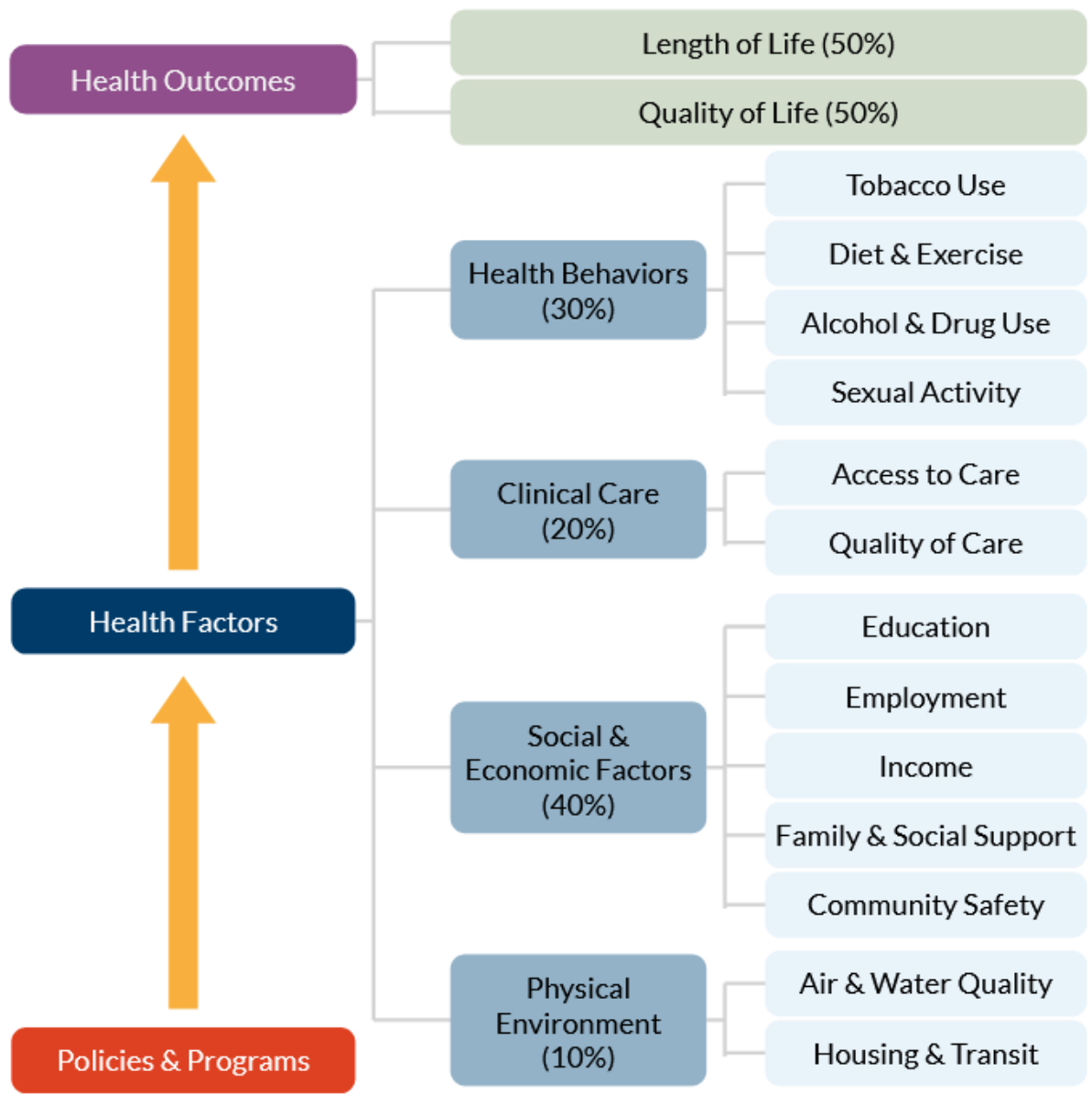
An early activity in pursuing this goal is to document the existence of hubs or hub-like activity currently operating in Maine. The Alliance is collaborating with other interested parties to conduct an online survey of community-level leaders. Results will allow hub advocates to work with local leaders to develop hubs on priority issues or regions, develop training and technical assistance resources for community-level volunteers and staff, and advocate with leaders of public and private organizations to fund such efforts.

## **Health**

The research is clear: health is not just the absence of disease nor the sole product of the medical care system. For more than two decades, the County Health Rankings, an annual report on the health status of every county in the United States from the University of Wisconsin, produced with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, has documented the collective impact of more than thirty factors on health, including the rate of infant mortality, the number of medical and behavioral health providers, and social conditions like food insecurity and severe housing problems.

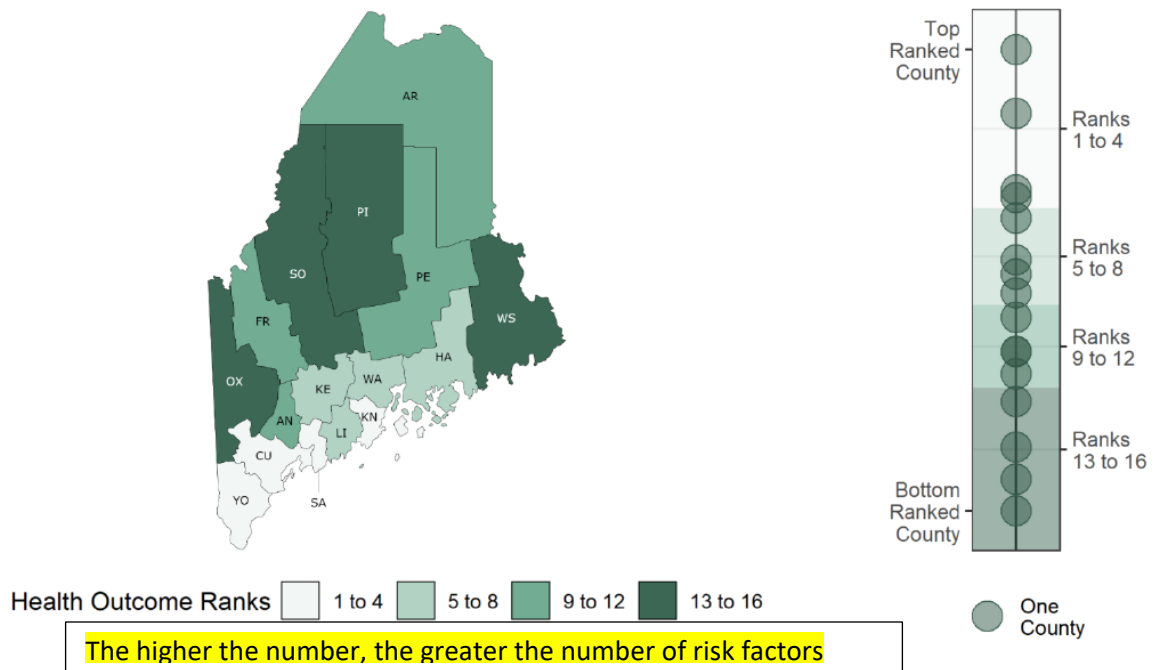
County Health Rankings Model <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/explore-health-rankings/county-health-rankings-model>

Health Outcomes are impacted by Health Factors, Policies and Programs, as depicted in the UWPHI model below. Achieving good health outcomes is impacted by behaviors, access and quality of care, economic and social factors, and the physical environment. There is not a single solution or a one-stop shop to ensure positive outcomes and equity.



County Health Rankings model © 2014 UWPHI

## Maine Counties



Understanding and using this broad view of health is central to the Alliance's actions to promote awareness and understanding, educate policymakers, and advocate for systemic solutions that deal with multiple challenges simultaneously, instead of within siloed sectors.

### Economic Prosperity

Like health, economic growth is the product of many factors. Experts cite the size of the workforce, level of productivity, natural resources, technology, and physical capital as key determinants of prosperity. The Alliance promotes a view that goes deeper and recognizes that the factors impacting health and equity are just as important.

Hundreds of recommendations have been made to bolster, expand and improve Maine's economy, starting with the Maine Economic Development Strategy report,(published in November 2019, just four months before the arrival of the pandemic), and subsequent reports published by the Department of Economic and Community Development and others, such as Making Maine Work, jointly published by the Maine State Chamber of Commerce and the Maine Development Foundation. Few recommendations mention health and, when they do, it's in the context of reducing healthcare costs.

Exceptions are an addendum to the Economic Recovery Report that references Maine's inadequate and outdated public health infrastructure and Making Maine Work's references to the state's high rates of smoking and obesity as key factors influencing the cost of care. The need to address equity is briefly referenced in these reports but explicit strategies to reduce poverty and achieve economic stability at all levels of society are lacking.

## **Equity**

Events of the past several years (the brutal death of George Floyd, the Black Lives Matter movement, heightened advocacy by LGBTQ+ organizations and immigrant rights groups, among others) have helped to move individual moral indignation to community action. Inequitable policies in health care, housing, and education have resulted in inequitable access to resources and poor outcomes for many marginalized populations.

Early in the pandemic, data on racial variations in infection rates and access to treatment revealed that Maine had some of the worst outcomes in the U.S. (the University of New Hampshire, Carsey School of Public Policy) While those statistics improved somewhat over time, COVID had an arguably positive impact on public awareness of the disparities and the need for immediate action to reduce them. The Maine Centers for Disease Control established a large advisory body of organizations representing racial and ethnic communities to identify needed actions, such as vaccine clinics and social media campaigns, with significant resources directed to support these activities.

These inequities, fed by decades of systemic racism, manifested in every part of Maine – in cities, rural communities, coastal fishing villages, the Western mountains and Northern farming communities. Only recently, led by entities like the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Maine Tribal Populations, Wabanaki Public Health and Wellness, and Maine Equal Justice, has the spotlight turned on the critical need for good data (analyzed and reported by race, ethnicity, income and other critical factors), strong community-led programs and equitable allocation of resources.

The Maine Alliance for Health and Prosperity is committed to ensuring equity in each of our actions, from membership and participation in meetings to convenings, education, and advocacy. We recognize we won't get it right every time and taking a learning approach is necessary. Using an equity lens as a tool is critical to learning and sustaining change.