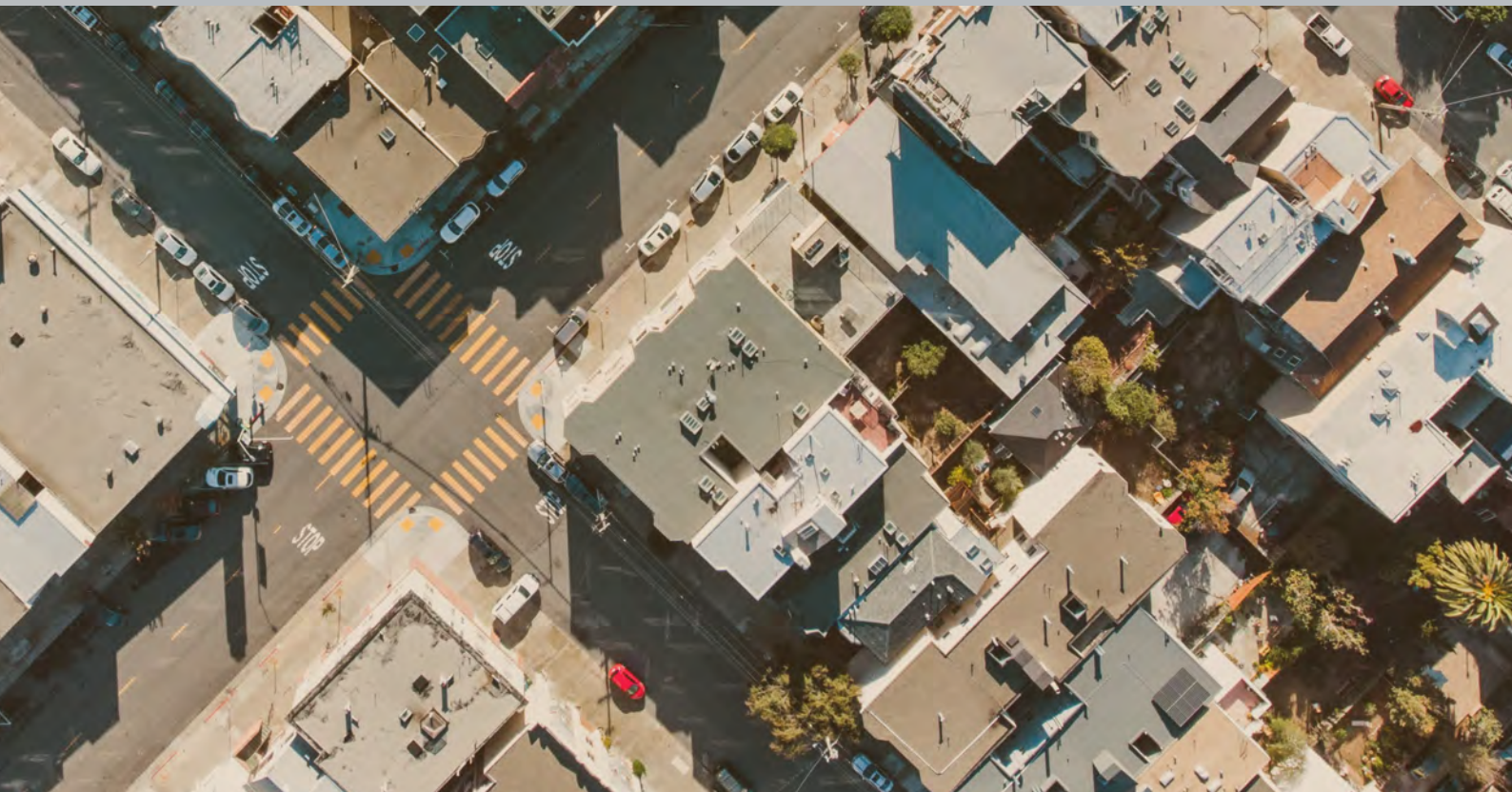




Gordon Policy Group

Are You a Health Care Provider?

How Organizations and Industries Beyond Primary Care Influence Community Health



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What is Health Care?

Most people think of health care as synonymous to medical treatment delivered by primary care providers. Registered nurses, doctors, or pharmacists are broadly recognized as participants within the health care industry. But would it be helpful to look at health care as not just products and services delivered by primary care providers, but as a broader topic which encompasses both medical care and the many other health influencing factors?

Medical care only accounts for 10 to 20 percent of health outcomes.¹

This presents a critical need to address the social determinants and nontraditional health care “providers” that account for the other 80 to 90 percent. These nontraditional providers contribute to the overall well-being of community members. These include easily identifiable industries like real estate and education, but also less acknowledged participants like energy production, economic anchors, and faith-based organizations. Examining health care from this broader perspective will help us understand current progress and how nontraditional providers can further contribute to healthier communities.

Real Estate: Building Healthier Communities

The real estate industry navigates issues that directly impact the daily lives of community members such as the cost and quality of residential housing. Ensuring access to affordable housing is a crucial part of building a healthy

and prosperous community. The financial strain caused by shortages of affordable housing often force families to choose between necessities.

Families with difficulty paying utility bills, mortgage, or rent are less likely to seek routine healthcare and more likely to postpone treatments and refuse emergency room service.²

Beyond housing, real estate developers have a large impact on the health of a community through determining the density and types of commercial development. In 2007, while Baltimore City was revising building code for the upcoming years, Bloomberg School of Public Health students and other researchers conducted a health impact assessment for the proposed changes. Among the changes, an issue stood out—the poorest neighborhoods in the city also had the highest density of liquor stores. As we know, there is a relationship between high liquor store density and higher rates of violent crime and poor health outcomes.³ Thus, in 2017 with a collaborative effort from real estate developers and other local participants, Baltimore City Council approved new zoning rules that are estimated to reduced violent crime, as well as poor health outcomes in low-income communities.⁴ Understanding how real estate development influences health can help us continue progress on improving the safety and wellbeing of communities.



Education and Promoting Healthy Lifestyles

Education is easily recognized as having an impact on health, but the level of influence school has on young people's wellbeing is often understated.

95 percent of young people spend about 6 hours of every weekday in school—nearly one fourth of their lives from the ages of 5 to 17.⁵

This presents schools with an important role of promoting health and safety during a critical period of development, as well as establishing lifelong patterns of good health.

Schools and the broader healthcare system are doing a lot of work to leverage the opportunity educators have to positively influence the health of kids and adolescents. Programs like CDC Healthy Schools are helping states, school systems, communities, and national partners engage in their role of preventing chronic disease and promoting the health and well-being of young people in schools.⁶ Membership Organizations like School-Based Health Alliance are supporting an education-healthcare partnership by promoting school-based health centers, primary care clinics based on U.S. school campuses with an emphasis on prevention and early intervention.⁷

Energy Providers and Health Care

The links between healthcare and the energy sector are often underrepresented in discussions about how to create healthier and safer communities.

Secure and reliable electricity supplies are needed for any modern hospital to operate. Temperature controlled supply chains are necessary to deliver food and medicine to communities across the country.

Energy providers are essential in meeting electricity demands, thus contribute heavily to the safety, stability, and overall health of a population.⁸

The energy sector also has a unique responsibility in managing the byproducts of energy production through ensuring that waste is properly disposed of as not to negatively harm the health of the surrounding environment and populations. In 2014, North Carolina was given a reminder of this responsibility when thousands of tons of coal ash spilled from Duke Energy's Dan River plant, sending toxic chemicals into the drinking water supply for surrounding communities. This incident resulted in years of regulatory battles, eventually ending in a large settlement, an agreement to clean up most of their

coal ash, and Department of Environmental Quality evaluations on each of Duke Energy's plant sites.⁹ Finding solutions to dealing with the waste before accidents occur will help protect communities from toxic byproducts while also avoiding additional regulations.

Jobs for a Healthier Community

Quality employment and job creation are important building blocks for any healthy community. The prosperity that results from strong economic activity carries numerous benefits to both individual and community health. Higher income and steady employment are positively correlated with better health outcomes, including lower rates of chronic disease, illness, and mortality.¹⁰ Employers also play an important role by negotiating with health plan providers and providing health benefits to their employees.

As of 2019, nearly half of the U.S. population receives employer-sponsored health insurance.¹¹

Employers also pay the majority of group health insurance premiums, paying 74% of family coverage group health insurance and 83% of single coverage group health insurance.¹²





Faith-Based Organizations and Community Health

The relationship between faith-based organizations and healthcare is another understated, yet crucial part of many communities across the country. Churches, Mosques, and Synagogues exist as vessels for bringing people together for positive change and initiatives. This presents faith-based organizations with the opportunity to reach members of the community that seek help with cases of mental and behavioral unrest, which causes often lie in health and environmental factors. In the events where this opportunity is realized, faith leaders can help improve the health of a community beyond just theology.

The Black Church has been particularly engaged in advocating for HIV awareness within the black community.¹³

Black people have the highest rate of HIV infection of any group in the United States, while also being the least likely

to access quality medical treatment for the disease. These disparities outlined the need for prevention-based initiatives goaled at lowering the rates of HIV infection in the black community. Non-profit organizations like the NAACP partnered with thousands of faith leaders across the country to sponsor HIV/AIDS workshops, integrating HIV/AIDS messaging in the worship service, and circulating HIV/AIDS prevention messages through new media such as the websites and social media.¹⁴

Connecting the Dots

There are many industries and organizations that typically get left out of health care discussions who's understated roles play a large part in influencing community health.

Bottom Line: Discussing health care as a broader idea that extends beyond primary care providers can help communities leverage industries and organizations that can directly impact health.

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