



Leveraging Opportunities in Health Care

After many generations in relationship with the land, vegetation and elements in New Mexico, communities have developed ways to sustain physical and mental health and wellness that often involve uses of medicinal plants, traditional practices and community support. Many of these traditions have endured and been adapted to contemporary contexts as alternatives and complements to modern approaches. Introduction of newer, less healthy diets and practices have taken a toll, however, with many New Mexicans facing challenges that traditional modalities sometimes cannot address.

Negative health outcomes in New Mexico are often driven by a lack of access to preventive medical care, lack of information among large segments of the population about options for healthy living, and lack of resources and infrastructure to implement these options. Chronic diseases such as diabetes and obesity affect New Mexicans at among the highest rates in the country, with behavioral health and substance abuse also negatively impacting large portions of our population. The rural nature of our state, as well as language and cultural barriers, introduce additional challenges in building and maintaining robust health across our communities. The Covid-19 pandemic has also brought existing disparities among our communities into sharp focus.

The McCune Foundation acknowledges that the scope of our state's public health challenges is vast, impacts hundreds of thousands of people and would require far more resources than the Foundation has available to invest. Consequently, in this area the Foundation is focusing its funding on specific strategic areas with an eye to long-term trends. Demographers predict that the average age of New Mexicans will continue to increase. With an aging population will come growing needs for elder care and innovative paths for seniors to opt to age in place in ways that honor culture, community cohesion, and appreciation for the wisdom and skills they share with younger generations.

Leveraging Opportunities in Health Care Key Leverage Points

Equitable and Innovative approaches to access. Geography, language, technology access and cost often hamper access to health care in New Mexico. Programs or organizations that use innovative approaches to mitigate these barriers and connect communities (including rural, tribal, elderly and other historically underserved populations) to effective, culturally competent, relevant health services are supported by this Foundation priority.

Frontline Healthcare Worker workforce development and support. Frontline healthcare workers and the use of other lay service providers represent a proven model for positively affecting health in New Mexican communities. In an [influential study](#), New Mexico community health workers working with a group of 448 high risk, high cost Medicaid managed care clients produced substantial cost reductions in emergency department and inpatient visits, and prescription drugs totaling over \$2 million in two years. Cost savings attributable to the New Mexico program exceeded program costs by four fold. In addition, between 2016 and 2026, New Mexico's long-term care sector will need to fill 66,200 home care job openings. The Foundation prioritizes programs that seek to develop this workforce and support the profession as a driver for economic development and job growth. In addition, the Foundation supports programs and services that bolster mental health and rejuvenation for health care workers to ease the burn-out that often drives people from these vital careers.

Integrated approaches to addressing social determinants. Addressing social determinants (such as access to clean air and water, safe neighborhoods and healthy food, among others) in the health of New Mexicans continues to grow as a priority strategy in generating better health outcomes. The Foundation prioritizes efforts that seek to address various social determinants in an integrated manner, either by connecting multiple initiatives or integrating health factors into other programs.

