



vulnerable populations portfolio



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The Vulnerable Populations Portfolio identifies new pathways for improved health by recognizing the integral relationship between our health and where and how we live, work, learn and play.

THE PROBLEM

At the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, our mission is to improve health and health care for all Americans. But improving health among the most vulnerable requires acknowledging that factors such as poverty, violence, inadequate housing and education contribute to poor health. If your family is not well off, if your schools do not allow you to be well educated, or if your community lacks resources, chances are you will not be healthy either. You will simply live a shorter and sicker life than those more fortunate.

OUR APPROACH

We recognize that to have a meaningful impact on the populations we hope to help, we must consider how complex social factors—poverty, education and housing—affect people's health, and develop solutions within that context.

A significant body of research has documented these social determinants of health. To overcome these nonmedical factors that lead to poor health, we fund a diverse group of innovative programs that address long-standing health issues within their broader social context through sensible, sustainable solutions that have potential for widespread replication and national impact.

Working on the ground level, within the context of challenged neighborhoods, struggling school systems, low-income households, failing institutions, and other related social conditions, we find common-sense routes to improved health. By changing the way we look at things, by helping each idea achieve its potential and by nurturing the expansion of models and their influence, we hope to expand our potential to improve individual and community health.

To achieve our goals, we use a multi-pronged strategy that includes: identifying compelling issues and supporting promising new models to address them; promoting the replication, sustainability and diffusion of successful models to create lasting change; and identifying specific areas of interest where there is an opportunity to achieve significant impact by funding “clusters” of grants that address different aspects of a complex challenge.

We support models that either improve or fundamentally change service delivery or practices and we develop strong partnerships with other funders and diverse stakeholders—especially those outside the health sector. We seek out fresh perspectives that challenge conventional thinking and which allocate and use resources more effectively.



We invest in solutions with real return on investment. Taking an entrepreneurial approach and using available resources, we help to create pragmatic and cost effective solutions that work to deliver real improvements in the immediate environment. While many programs possess the potential for scale, they all are born from an idea whose potential return on investment rests in its ability to change paradigms and create lasting value.

To maximize the impact of our work, we develop projects that *redirect* available resources and energies for better results, *re-engineer* existing institutional conditions, *renew* the vitality of local environments and organizations and *re-imagine* ways to navigate around the social obstacles to better health.

WHAT WE FUND

The Vulnerable Populations Portfolio is committed to meeting emerging health needs of communities by identifying smarter, cost-effective ways to address problems of the most vulnerable. We seek new and different partners to expand our reach that can bring smart, innovative solutions to our communities.

There are four characteristics that we look for in prospective grantees:

- The opportunity to make better health possible by addressing the social barriers that stand in the way not only of individuals, but also of entire communities. From improving the safety of neighborhoods to changing the way we think about violence, to bringing recess, play and conflict resolution skills back to the playground, our grantees find innovative ways to make better health possible in the context of difficult life circumstances.
- The ability to develop practical solutions to broad social challenges ranging from mental illness to school environments that don't promote learning to deteriorating elder care facilities.
- The vision to work in nontraditional environments to solve problems that affect health. By working outside the usual areas of health focus, in places as diverse as schools, streets and jails, our grantees go to where health starts to introduce change. Our programs give people who need it most the opportunity and the means to take personal responsibility for improving their health and the quality of their lives.
- The capacity to create immediate and lasting change. Our programs create immediate health improvement for the vulnerable people directly touched by their efforts, and reach exponentially outward by seeding change within a field, ultimately offering the potential for long-term, sustainable and broad scale health improvement within entire communities and ideas that can foment change across the nation.

WHAT WE DO NOT FUND

We will not provide funding for efforts that do not address the social factors and structures that drive health status as part of their proposed model. Grantees must recognize that health starts outside a doctor's office, and indeed, outside the health care system, and design their efforts from that perspective. We do not fund documentaries, capital projects, endowments, programs that address a single medical condition, core support for free or safety net clinics and safety net programs, child welfare services,

gun control efforts, explicit faith based/sectarian programs, human trafficking, disease management models, or well tested models whose effectiveness has already been established and that have been widely disseminated.

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