RWJF Culture of Health
Community Portrait

Adams County, Mississippi
ABOUT THIS REPORT

The Sentinel Communities Surveillance project, conducted by RTI International in collaboration with the RAND Corporation, is sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The project, which began in 2016, will monitor activities related to how a Culture of Health is developing in each of 30 diverse communities around the country for at least five years. This community-specific report follows from the initial Snapshot report for Adams County, Mississippi, and provides insights into drivers of a Culture of Health in the community. The report is not intended to comprehensively describe every action underway in Adams County, but rather focuses on key insights, opportunities, and challenges as a community advances on its journey toward health and well-being for all residents.

The information in this report was obtained using several data collection methods, including key informant telephone interviews, an environmental scan of online and published community-specific materials, a review of existing population surveillance and monitoring data, and collection of local data or resources provided by community contacts or interview respondents. Interviews were conducted with individuals representing organizations working in a variety of sectors (for example, health, business, education, faith-based, and environment) in the community. Sector mapping was used to systematically identify respondents in a range of sectors that would have insights about community health and well-being to ensure organizational diversity across the community. We also asked original interviewees to recommend individuals to speak with in an effort to supplement important organizations or perspectives not included in the original sample.

A total of 10 unique respondents were interviewed during spring 2017 for this report. All interviews (lasting 30–75 minutes each) were conducted using semistructured interview guides, tailored to the unique context and activities taking place in each community and to the role of the respondent in the community. Interviewers used probes to ensure that they obtained input on specific items of interest (for example, facilitators and barriers to improved population health, well-being, and equity) and open-ended questions to ensure that they fully addressed and captured participants’ responses and perceptions about influences on health and well-being in their communities. Individuals who participated in a key informant interview are not identified by name or organization to protect confidentiality, but they are identified as a “respondent.” Information collected through environmental scans includes program and organizational information available on internet websites, publicly available documents, and media reports. Population surveillance and monitoring data were compiled from publicly available data sets, including the American Community Survey; Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System; and other similar federal, state, and local data sources.

We will conduct ongoing surveillance and monitoring activities in these communities through 2020 and report updated information on their progress, challenges, and lessons learned in improving health and well-being for all residents. Data collection and monitoring thus far has revealed common themes among otherwise distinct communities. The next phase of this project will be cross-community reports. These will examine common themes across subgroups of the 30 communities (for example, rural communities, communities experiencing large demographic shifts, and communities leveraging local data for decision-making). These reports also will be posted on cultureofhealth.org.
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Introduction

In our Snapshot profile of Adams County, Mississippi, we described a small community that is still early in its journey to establish an equitable place where all residents can thrive. The community’s economy relies on a controversial tourism industry that features antebellum mansions with little mention of its history of slavery. In addition, Adams County faces limited public health funding and infrastructure to support wellness initiatives, and is challenged by the state of the education system. Despite these challenges, the county has made efforts to move beyond its history of racially based marginalization to unify the community around shared objectives, including the improvement of economic opportunities and changing of the environment to support healthy behaviors. However, sharp and persistent disparities in poverty, employment, and health outcomes between Adams County’s black and white residents underscore the importance of cross-initiative coordination and meaningful engagement of all community members to ensure that investments yield sustainable, population-wide improvements.

In this report, we examine Adams County’s efforts to improve population health and build a healthier and more equitable community using the Culture of Health Action Framework to interpret and organize key findings. The Framework prioritizes four broad areas: 1) Making Health a Shared Value; 2) Fostering Cross-Sector Collaboration to Improve Well-Being; 3) Creating Healthier, More Equitable Communities; and 4) Strengthening Integration of Health Services and Systems. Within these priority areas, activities and investments can advance population...
health, well-being, and equity in diverse community contexts. Using the Framework, we describe key initiatives underway in Adams County that aim to revitalize the county’s economy, education, and built environment and build capacity to deliver preventive health programs and services. We also assess the facilitators that support the community’s progress toward a healthier, more equitable community and describe the persistent barriers that hinder that progress.

**LOW EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES**

Adams County is a predominantly rural community located on Mississippi’s southwestern border with Louisiana. Considered the birthplace of Mississippi, Natchez is the county seat and oldest town along the Mississippi River. The county has a population of 31,979, with black residents comprising the majority, followed by residents who are white, Hispanic, and of Asian origins. Natchez is not only the county seat, but also a central location for commerce and life in Adams County. Although the city makes up only 48 percent of Adams County’s population, groups and leaders in Natchez, including the municipal government, have been the main promoters of initiatives and efforts to improve well-being at the county level.

In the late 20th century, the closure of a few large manufacturing plants in Adams County led to a loss in revenue and employment opportunities. In response, the county transformed itself from an old industrial community to one whose economy relies largely on tourism that celebrates antebellum homes. Although the tourism industry has created economic opportunities for residents, it also serves as a reminder of the county’s traumatic history of slavery. Further, tourism does not provide sufficient jobs to counteract the county’s high unemployment rates, which are substantially higher than the nation’s. Many residents, especially black residents, rely on two minimum wage jobs to make ends meet. Thirty percent of residents live below the poverty line (41% for blacks; 14% for whites). The county’s lack of economic opportunities, coupled with income inequality suppresses the growth of a middle class and forces many residents to move out in search of jobs.

**DISPARATE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES**

Inextricably tied to the employability of Adams County’s residents are poor educational outcomes, which disproportionately impact black residents. Although test scores have increased slightly in recent years, the county’s public schools still lag behind those across the state and nation. The county’s single public school system, which lacks adequate resources and faces poor teacher retention, received an F rating, the lowest rating possible, in 2016, from the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE). This rating is concerning given that the high school graduation rate for Adams County is just 64 percent, compared with the state’s graduation rate of 76 percent. The county’s private and parochial schools comprise mostly white students (80%), whereas nearly all of the students enrolled in the public school system are black (95%).

To address this opportunity gap, programs and initiatives across sectors in Adams County are using data to educate and train residents in the skills that local businesses need. One of the key drivers of these efforts is attracting new business to the area. As stated by one respondent from the education sector, “The school system and school achievement levels are important, because they represent the kids that are going to become [new companies'] employees. That can make or break the decision of a company to locate here.”

Another concern is the poor building conditions of the public schools, which have not been renovated for more than 50 years. To address this concern, the Natchez Adams School District proposed Mission 21, a bond issue that would generate funding for renovations from taxpayer dollars. Supporters of Mission 21 hoped that renovations would have the added benefit of showing the community that education is a priority, and that it would also attract certified teachers to improve the school’s ratings and test scores. Initially, residents responded favorably to the proposal. However, of the 33 percent of residents who voted on the proposal, only 48 percent voted in favor; the bond issue needed the approval of 60 percent of voters to pass.

**POOR HEALTH INDICATORS**

In addition to poor academic performance, Adams County shows poorer health indicators when compared with the state and nation. The rates of infant mortality (12 per 1,000 live births), smoking (24%), adult obesity (38%), and diabetes (14%) are higher than in the nation.

Additionally, 20 percent of black residents and 17 percent of white residents lack health insurance coverage. This is partially because Mississippi did not expand Medicaid as part of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA). These health disparities have been highlighted in the “Natchez and Adams County Blueprint for Action,” which was developed through a partnership between the Clinton Health Matters Initiative (CHMI), the Humana Foundation, and the City of Natchez.

Merit Health Natchez Hospital and Jefferson Comprehensive Health Center are the two major health care institutions in Adams County. In 2014, Community Health Systems, Inc. acquired Natchez Regional Medical Center and Natchez Community Hospital to become part of a larger health system that is now referred to as Merit Health Natchez Hospital. The acquisition, which was expected to improve access to care, increase available resources, and improve efficiency, did not go over well with all Natchez-area health care providers. Changes such as a new electronic record system, hiring of hospitalists, and lack of shared decision-making, left some local doctors feeling excluded and frustrated.

In addition, the county has a shortage of health care professionals for mental, dental, and primary care services, and no plans are currently on the horizon to address this shortage. For the 2016–2017 insurance fiscal year, Adams County decided to self-insure county employees.
A self-funded insurance program allows the county to pay medical claims for each employee up to a $50,000 threshold. As a result of this decision, Adams County shaved off an estimated $320,000 from its budgeted total of $2 million for employee health insurance. Additionally, county employees can now see the newly hired county nurse practitioner for health care needs, which the county hopes will reduce costs associated with emergency room and after-hour clinic visits.  

Although Adams County has struggled with limited resources to strengthen its economy, education, and health systems, its transportation system has won state-level awards for its innovations and serves as a model for other Mississippi communities. The Natchez Transit System started as a means of transportation to and from the local senior center in 2007. The senior center director, recognizing the potential of expanding the system to other residents, collaborated with the Natchez Board of Alderman, Mississippi Department of Transportation, and federal representatives to secure buy-in. As a result of this effort, the Natchez Transit System debuted in March 2014. A combination of city funds, passenger fares, the federal government, and the Mississippi Department of Transportation provides the funding for the transit system. Recognized by the Mississippi Public Transit Association as the “first comprehensive regional rural transportation center,” the Natchez Transit System’s buses and vans connect residents across the county and over the river into Louisiana.

Local government—in both Adams County and the City of Natchez—and some nonprofit organizations provide the community with most of its resources for planning and implementing new economic opportunities and built environment improvements. The local government, which comprises the Adams County Board of Supervisors, the city of Natchez, and other elected officials, has been a leader in developing partnerships to address challenges in economic and business development, education, workforce training, housing, and chronic disease management. It identifies gaps in local resources and prioritizes plans, and coordinates public-private partnerships.

For instance, the city government partnered with the Business and Civic League, Chamber of Commerce, and Natchez Now (a group representing private business interests) to establish a public-private partnership, Natchez, Inc., in 2010. The group’s primary aim is to bring new businesses to Natchez, given the recent closing of major manufacturing companies. However, it also works with local educational institutions, like Alcorn University, a historically black college whose business and nursing schools are based in Natchez, to deliver skills trainings and match employees to jobs.

The Mississippi State Health Department provides Adams County with a community health director who promotes policy, systems, and environmental changes; the director also supports eight other counties, and approximately 175,000 people. Although it lacks a formal structure and decision-making process, Adams County offers a variety of health programs to meet the needs and health concerns of residents. However, there is limited coordination and integration of health services, leaving some residents, especially low-income and minority populations, unaware of these services or unable to access them, according to respondents from the health sector. The mayor of Natchez is addressing this issue by attempting to reduce duplication of efforts and promote collaboration across initiatives. The mayor is leveraging the Community Alliance of Natchez-Adams County, a local nonprofit, as a designated convener. As a respondent from the health sector explained, “I think people do want to coordinate better, but they are just so busy with their own programs.” As a first step, the Community Alliance created and posted a list of community resources on its website, to which the city can refer residents. In addition, it is actively recruiting more diverse members to its Board to better represent an equity perspective in its work.

Both regional and national nonprofits and foundations have also played a role in addressing health and well-being in Adams County. In 2014, CHMI and the Humana Foundation provided funding to Adams County to promote healthy lifestyles through prevention programs and health education classes, with the goal of reducing disease prevalence by 2020. Both foundations have tried to hire a champion for the community to implement their Blueprint for Action through the coordination of various initiatives and sectors—a position that is currently vacant.

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CITY GOVERNMENT RESPONDENT

Some local nonprofits are taking a multisector approach to improving community health. They have worked together to plan, coordinate, and implement initiatives to improve the built environment and address the lack of economic opportunities through business development. The Community Alliance, a volunteer organization focusing on the built environment; the Friends Of the Riverfront (F.O.R) Natchez, a community-based organization addressing quality of life issues; and Project HEAL Natchez (Health. Equity. Art. Learning.), a local effort to build cultural capacity, are important outlets for leaders from different disciplines to discuss shared objectives and engage residents. As a representative from the city government explains, “Certain relationships that have been built with residents and business leaders [come] from being connected to the Community Alliance. With those key members of the community [like] churches and business to help us, outreach is exponentially better.”
Improving Social and Economic Opportunities

Although research demonstrates the link between employment/the built environment and health outcomes, Adams County is not intentionally adopting a social determinants framework or equity lens to address well-being and health. Rather, it tends to focus on improving social and economic opportunities as a way to make the county a more desirable place for businesses to open shop, tourists to visit, and people to live.

CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION TO BUILD SKILLS AND CREATE NEW JOBS

Employment status can have a positive impact on health because of its link to income, insurance, and other resources that play a role in health, such as housing. To address employment in Adams County, the Board of Supervisors and Natchez, Inc. formed a partnership with the Delta Regional Authority for the construction of the Belwood Levee, a project that is expected to deliver an investment of $350 million and create an additional 450 to 500 jobs at the site.

In addition to creating new jobs, the community is focused on workforce development and capacity building. For instance, one respondent from the education sector noted that the Concordia Parrish in Louisiana and Alcorn State University worked together to enlist Adams County in the national Miss-Lou Regional Certified Work Ready program. Adams County was the first county in Mississippi to earn the designation. To receive the certification, schools, employers, and businesses worked together to identify the specific skills needed to perform jobs and then outlined a plan to build skills among residents. Employers and businesses that participate designate a certain number of positions for residents who have obtained the ACT (American College Testing) National Career Readiness Certificate™ (NCRC). Employers benefit from this because they know that when they hire someone with this certification, the person has the training and skills to successfully carry out the duties of the job. Likewise, participants benefit by making themselves more qualified for jobs in the community. Not only does the designation help meet existing business and community needs, it also has the potential to attract new business. As a respondent from the education sector explains, “Being able to tell prospective companies that your community has been Certified Work Ready is important, because it increases your chances of being chosen as their home immensely.”

Getting the Certified Work Ready certification required more than a year’s worth of strategic planning and infrastructure development among the representatives from Concordia Economic Development Association; Natchez; Inc.; Alcorn State University; Adams County and Concordia Parish businesses; K-12 schools; community and technical colleges; Central Louisiana Economic Development Alliance; workforce investment offices; Chambers of Commerce; and elected officials. To date, nearly 600 Adams County residents have completed the ACT NCRC in a local high school or community college, and nearly 50 employers support the program by designating jobs for those certified.

To maintain the Certified Work Ready designation, Adams County must meet and maintain preselected goals, including a certain percentage of high school and college students completing the NCRC assessment. ACT monitors the program closely and provides public updates on the county’s progress via its website. According to a respondent from the education sector, community champions also frequently report progress to a local employer roundtable, civic clubs, and the Board of Supervisors, and publicize their work through the local newspaper, Chamber of Commerce, businesses, and churches.

ARTS TO BRING IMPROVED QUALITY OF LIFE

Although historically the county has not adopted an equity lens in its initiatives, it is making a positive shift in this direction regarding economic opportunities and quality-of-life improvements. In collaboration with Louisville-based IDEAS xLab, Natchez partners won grant funding from the National Endowment for the Arts; Our Town; Humana Inc.; the MS Humanities Council; and We Shall Overcome Fund to continue their work on Project HEAL Natchez, a local effort to develop a “Cultural Blueprint for Health.” At the core of this project is the idea that “arts and culture [are] key drivers for learning, action and evaluation by communities seeking to increase civic engagement toward greater participation in policy-making and improved well-being.” The goal of Project HEAL Natchez is to promote equity and build new community wealth in Natchez black-owned businesses and organizations through capacity building in arts, culture, and heritage tourism. St. Catherine’s Street, a predominantly black area, serves as a focal point for its efforts. Key collaborators in this initiative include the Natchez Art Association; National Coalition for 100 Black Women SW Mississippi Chapter; Miss-Lou Heritage Group and Tours; Historic Natchez Foundation; Natchez Heritage School of Cooking; Visit Natchez Association for the Preservation of African American Culture; and the Mississippi State Department of Health.

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A TENET OF PROJECT HEAL NATCHEZ

Although the county has made strides in workforce development and is taking steps to bring new businesses to the region and narrow the racial opportunity gap, the government has faced civic barriers to advancing one of the core drivers of employability: a better public school system. Only one-third of residents showed up to vote on the school bond issue to build a new high school and renovate existing schools. An increase in community awareness and engagement could have a positive, long-term impact on the educational outcomes for the county’s...
youngest and most vulnerable residents—particularly black families who often cannot afford the local private schools because of substantially lower incomes than white residents.

**BETTER BUILT ENVIRONMENT TO ADDRESS CHRONIC DISEASE**

Adams County and the City of Natchez have a vested interest in maintaining and creating access to the historical sites that attract tourists to the area. For instance, the Community Alliance is coordinating efforts by several local organizations and assisting with fundraising to build a Civil Rights Trail through historic downtown. In addition to supporting tourism, however, these efforts also provide more green spaces for residents to be physically active. The Community Alliance and the City of Natchez worked together to raise nearly $2.3 million in federal and state funding and another $390,000 through a grassroots campaign to develop nearly six miles of walking, running, and biking trails, completed in 2012. In addition to volunteers, the Alliance includes membership from city and county government, such as public works, the city planner, city engineers, and others critical to community development. Other groups that participate in the Alliance include smaller nonprofits like Keep Mississippi Beautiful, the National Biking Club, and Christmas in Natchez.

To reflect more diverse voices in the prioritization and planning of goals and activities to improve the built environment, the Community Alliance is distributing a questionnaire to residents via its mailing list and Facebook. The Board plans to use the responses to update its vision and mission statements and develop a strategic framework for its activities. It also plans to partner with Project HEAL to increase civic engagement from the county’s marginalized communities who have been historically underrepresented.

Similarly, F.O.R. Natchez, a community-based nonprofit, raised $100,000 to design a Downtown Master Plan to revitalize the downtown bluff area and business district along Martin Luther King Jr. Street, home to businesses traditionally owned by black residents. To create a concept plan, it worked with Walker Collaborative (led by the former city planner) to conduct more than 20 diverse focus groups, a design workshop where residents could sketch their own city plans, and a public presentation, which was attended by at least 100 people.

Local governments also collaborated with a national alliance, My Brother’s Keeper (MBK), to improve the built environment specifically to meet the needs of community residents. MBK is an initiative launched by former President Barack Obama to decrease opportunity gaps for men and boys of color. The initiative awarded $200,000 to the City of Natchez to renovate Jack Waite park and North Natchez park, located in a predominantly black community. The Jack Waite park includes 10 new pieces of playground and fitness equipment and a vegetable garden used to educate children. Although anecdotally the community experiences a good turnout at the new trails and parks, it does not systematically collect data on how many people are using them or how frequently.

These efforts to enhance the county’s environment for tourism and physical activity build on existing assets, including its exemplary transit system, which enhances access to jobs and local services, such as basic health care and community colleges. However, despite statewide recognition, the relatively new transit system, created in 2014, has its limitations. For instance, the system only accepts cash, and the price ($3 per ride) can be steep for some. According to community respondents, many residents must also travel outside of the transit system’s service area to access health care specialists, given the limited services provided within the county itself.

**PREVENTIVE HEALTH MEASURES**

According to a health sector respondent, Adams County’s privatized health care system and community clinics are overworked and overburdened with requests for basic services. To increase the capacity of the county, the state’s public health department has provided a Health Educator and Preventive Health Nurse to offer health education to residents, such as safe sleep education and chronic disease self-management workshops at the public library and senior center. The health department also trained a staff member at the local Helping Hands Counseling group to become a certified health insurance navigator to help residents use the ACA insurance marketplace. Although the Adams County Health Department provides basic services and programs like these, it does not appear to have an official long-term strategic plan to address health and health outcomes.

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FAITH-BASED COMMUNITY RESPONDENT

As one community respondent explained, the Natchez and Adams County Blueprint for Action developed by the Clinton Foundation and Humana is an important planning document in Adams County. These national foundations collaborate with local government, the faith sector, and local citizens to develop and implement wellness programs that address the high-priority health areas outlined in the blueprint. To this end, Humana awarded the City of Natchez $250,000 in 2016 and another $105,000 in 2017 to build capacity of health educators and coaches and to sustain programs focused on preventing diabetes, heart disease, and infant mortality.

The community members that the foundations trained as coaches and community health workers delivered a year-long Diabetes and Heart Disease Prevention Program, designed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, at Copiah-Lincoln Community College. Residents who participated in the program received classes on smoking cessation, healthy eating, and physical activity and were required to exercise for at least 150 minutes per week. At the end of the program’s first year, half of the participants decreased their body weight by at least 7 percent, and 91 percent achieved normal blood pressure. According to the Humana Project Manager, the Natchez program has been “remarkably successful,” especially compared with other communities; she partially attributes this success to the dedication of Natchez Mayor Darryl Grennell. In addition, participants held each other accountable to their goals, which demonstrates the promise
of integrating a social support model to improve community health and well-being. The program’s leaders are further encouraged that more than 100 residents are participating in the second cycle of the program, which is double the enrollment of the first year.25

The City of Natchez and Humana also applied this grassroots, capacity-building approach to improve maternal and child health outcomes. They trained residents to serve as doulas and breastfeeding counselors with the aim of reducing infant mortality rates among low-income women on Medicaid through the Healthy Babies, Healthy Mums program. Additionally, they collaborated with churches and workplaces to help residents prevent and manage heart disease.24 According to one program administrator, they teach churches to encourage healthy changes in their congregations, through recipe sharing and healthy church dinners. As one staff member from the City of Natchez states, “Humana has made some real changes in the community.” However, other respondents from the foundation explain that the full potential has not been reached, citing the need for a more collective partnership across sectors in the county.25

Summary of County’s Efforts to Build a Culture of Health

Based on the Culture of Health Framework used to guide Sentinel community data collection and monitoring in Adams County, slow progress is underway in developing a culture where all residents can thrive. The county shows some signs of progress in Fostering Cross-Sector Collaboration to Improve Well-Being, particularly in its efforts to strengthen the economy through job creation and workforce development. However, the community’s understanding of the economic and education systems as pathways to health is less established, and it does not appear to coordinate its efforts, demonstrating limited advancement in Making Health a Shared Value. Although a few individuals champion an equity lens in their work, this perspective is not reflected in much of the community planning. Adams County remains in the early phases of Creating a Healthier, More Equitable Community. Potentially driven by a lack of communication and a general mistrust based on historic racism, the majority of marginalized residents are not engaged in civic activities. Through both regional and national public-private partnerships, the county has made progress in Strengthening Integration of Health Services and Systems through capacity building and training residents to serve in health education and coaching roles. However, state-level challenges, like Mississippi’s decision not to expand Medicaid and the large portion of residents without insurance, pose persistent challenges to improving health care coverage and access.

Facing Racial Discrimination, Trust Issues

Adams County focuses on improving quality of life outcomes through public-private partnerships that emphasize economic development to create jobs and attract new businesses. Recent efforts resulted in completion of the Natchez Trails, new parks, and the collective loss of 300 pounds by residents through the diabetes prevention program funded by the Humana Foundation.27 However, the impact of these various initiatives on the health of the residents themselves is unclear, particularly given the county’s history of racism, distrust, and disparities. Community respondents explain that the most vulnerable residents, especially low-income and black residents, often do not know about local resources and efforts, many of which lack regular or public meetings.

As one respondent from the faith-based community described, “Adams County residents are still living in the mindset of North and South Natchez,” a time when the community was racially segregated. This mindset makes it difficult for Adams County residents to see that the issues affecting one resident of Adams County influence all residents. Although Adams County focuses its efforts to improve the health and well-being of residents overall, additional resources and considerations are necessary to specifically engage and serve black residents, who have been historically marginalized and who continue to fare worse across health and social outcomes. To build a unified sense of community, some residents—including faith leaders—participate in Mission Mississippi, which makes a conscious effort to get black and white residents talking and building trust so they can better work together. Despite these efforts at creating a unified community, greater collective action is needed to address the lasting impact of Adams County’s legacy.

Incorporating community voices in the discussions about priorities can help Adams County improve the efficiency of programs by ensuring that their design adequately addresses community needs. Programs will likely be more successful if all segments of society work together to prioritize the needs of underserved populations. In addition, the community faces limited public funding and resources, which would help it implement plans to attract new business and create jobs; continue to improve the built environment; enhance the public schools; and carry out Humana and CHM’s Blueprint for Action and Project HEAL’s equity-focused Cultural Blueprint for Health.

Adams County’s local economy serves as a gateway to many improvements by generating capital, and funding the public education system and other public programs. On the other hand, a focus on improving the public education system first may prove to be an important factor in attracting new businesses to the community and subsequently creating jobs. To date, investment in the education system remains secondary to improvements to the economy, although both are vital to the prosperity of the county. Our analysis of Adams County’s progress toward developing a community where all residents can flourish suggests additional limitations. Currently, limited opportunities exist for underserved populations (like, poor, rural, and racial minorities) to participate in the decision-making process. Additional conversations
with representatives from the health care industry and other sectors, like social service providers and faith-based organizations, may shed light on these issues. Moving forward, it will be important to track and understand the impact of Project HEAL on the county’s progress in creating a more equitable community, where all its residents can thrive, particularly those who have faced decades of inequalities.

In addition, the lack of cross-sector collaboration, funding, and a weak economy limit the sustainability and impact of community initiatives. More investment in intentional collaboration and the removal of long-standing silos is necessary to help collect and share data, develop priorities and sustainable strategies, evaluate programs, and share best practices to address the wide range of factors that drive health. The impact of external investments from the Humana and Clinton Foundations is still unknown. Monitoring impact data and demonstrating a change in key social and health indicators, including employment and obesity, will likely be crucial to sustained investment from external funders.
References