Joining Forces to Build Momentum

Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, MD, MBA
President and Chief Executive Officer
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Near the front door of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) hangs a quilt that tells the stories of several lives—stories of love, spirit, and joy—tragically cut short because of HIV/AIDS. Every six months for the past 14 years, we have had the privilege of displaying a different section of the AIDS Memorial Quilt at our headquarters, and the profound honor of getting to know these individuals through the moving patchworks created by their loved ones.

Every time a new section arrives, I stop and take it in. I think about the kaleidoscope of people who came together to create the commemoration. And the meaningful mosaic of fabric—a pair of favorite blue jeans, a military uniform, a choir robe, a fluffy childhood blanket—they selected in tribute. Pieced together—ultimately covering the entire National Mall in Washington—the Quilt is a testament to the power of joining forces.

Building a Culture of Health in America, I’ve realized, is much like assembling a quilt. It requires many hands working together. And often, the most unlikely pairings create the most evocative designs.

The Foundation never intended to build the movement toward a Culture of Health alone. And, in the two years since we first shared the vision, it has become increasingly clear how critical it is that we join hands with others in this effort. In fact, it’s imperative.

Why? Because no individual, organization, or sector can alter the course of America’s health single-handedly. In January, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, National Institutes of Health Director Dr. Francis Collins noted that just 20 percent of health outcomes depend on the health care sector. Health is inextricably tied to where we live, learn, work, and play. It is shaped by the stability and safety of our housing, the quality of our schools, and the availability of clean, safe, open spaces in our communities.
That is why, now, more than ever, we at RWJF are convinced this movement must be championed not solely by those in the health sector, but also by those who have not historically seen themselves as part of the health arena—sectors such as criminal justice, real estate development, finance, and technology; as well as organizations focused on civic engagement, equity, and economic prosperity.

With that in mind, as part of this Annual Message we are issuing a challenge to individuals and organizations across America to forge new and unconventional partnerships with the goal of building a Culture of Health that benefits all.

At RWJF we have been striving to walk the talk. Over the past year, my colleagues and I have traveled many miles expanding our existing partnerships and establishing relationships with new allies. Some may be surprised to learn that we—the nation’s largest philanthropy dedicated solely to health—have been actively co-creating strategies with organizations such as the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, AARP, and the Urban Land Institute.
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Now, I’ll admit, it’s not always easy to build alliances with unexpected partners. You have to step outside of your comfort zone, and sometimes learn a new way of thinking and communicating (I can attest to this first-hand as a physician who recently addressed a room full of bankers). But we are committed to doing this more intently in the days and years to come. And we will be asking our grantees to do the same.

In line with this broader approach, we have categorized our funding and programming into four major themes that reflect our determination to move beyond place-based problem-solving and aim, instead, to change the interconnected systems that influence health:

- Healthy Children, Healthy Weight
- Healthy Communities
- Transforming Health and Health Care Systems
- Leadership for Better Health

Additionally, last fall we introduced an Action Framework that illustrates how we intend to work alongside others in the national effort to build a Culture of Health, and how different sectors can mobilize and measure progress. Rigorously developed with insight from more than 1,000 stakeholders, this Action Framework has been embraced by organizations and communities nationwide.

It has been inspiring to see how others are using—or, as Alonzo Plough (our Vice President for Research-Evaluation-Learning and Chief Science Officer likes to say, “riffing on”—the Action Framework to achieve their own visions of a Culture of Health. I’ve shared some examples below, and I encourage you to visit www.CultureofHealth.org for more stories from the field.

How will our four new themes affect funding? We anticipate our overall funding to remain the same—$400 to $450 million—for the next 12 to 18 months. But in order to stay nimble and respond to changing needs, we will review our strategies regularly and, if needed, adjust our levels of support.
As we move forward, RWJF will continue to concentrate on engaging with partners and researchers who consider equity fundamental to health; experts like Raj Chetty, professor of economics at Stanford University and a MacArthur "genius" Fellow, whose Equality of Opportunity Project focuses on how we can give children from disadvantaged backgrounds a better chance of upward mobility and success.

Additionally, through our three new research programs, we hope to bring new and necessary findings to light in order to more clearly identify and address the root causes of health inequity.

Equity is Essential

Our country cannot build a comprehensive Culture of Health as long as many continue to face steep and stubborn barriers to well-being. That is why the Foundation has identified achieving health equity as a critical component of everything we do.
Healthy Children, Healthy Weight

Every child in America should have the opportunity to develop socially, emotionally, physically, and cognitively to the best of his or her ability. That includes growing up at a healthy weight.

For more than a decade, RWJF has been deeply committed to reversing the childhood obesity epidemic in America. We have partnered with schools, policymakers, and the food industry to help kids eat healthier and participate in more physical activity, and we are beginning to see signs of positive change. Across the nation, obesity rates are down five percentage points among our youngest children. But the progress is fragile and uneven. African-American and Latino children are still faring worse than their white counterparts and, overall, one of every three kids remains overweight. So we have to keep at it. That is why last year the Foundation committed another $500 million over a decade to continue the effort. This new round of funding will support family, school, and community initiatives to eliminate obesity disparities, and to ensure that every child starts kindergarten at a healthy weight.

We also will continue to support cross-cutting work by organizations like the Partnership for a Healthier America and the Alliance for a Healthier Generation that have garnered voluntary agreements to create healthier environments for kids. The American Beverage Association, for example, recently met its agreement to remove full-calorie sodas from schools and reduce the number of total beverage calories shipped to schools by 90 percent. And McDonald’s is moving forward on its commitment to transform Happy Meals® to include healthier options, offer more fruit and salad, and remove soda from menu boards that target kids.

To flourish, children must receive good nutrition and they must also experience healthy cognitive and emotional development—particularly in their earliest years.

RWJF supports work that provides families—and the neighbors, educators, health care practitioners, and others in their lives—with the tools they need to help kids thrive right from the start. Our priorities include raising awareness of prenatal care, addressing adverse childhood experiences, and eliminating barriers to health care and coverage for families.

This comprehensive approach is reflected in a 10-year initiative we have launched with our longtime allies at the YMCA of the USA. With our support, the Y is exploring new ways to meet the specific needs of individual communities by providing clinic-to-community health services and by strengthening the quality of early learning programs for all children.

We also are funding research to determine what types of home visiting programs can help families the most. And we are working alongside Sesame Workshop® and other organizations to promote social and emotional development of families and young children using new technology and other creative approaches.
In Philadelphia, for instance, positive change is building upon itself. For almost a decade, the city’s school district has worked with the health department to push forward a comprehensive nutrition policy for children, removing sugary beverages from schools and deep fryers from school kitchens. In 2007, the city passed a worker protection indoor smoking ban. And the following year, it enacted the nation’s most comprehensive nutrition-labeling law for chain restaurants. In 2010, parks and recreation centers went smoke-free, and the police worked with the streets department to add more bike lane miles than any other city in the nation. Prisons, homeless centers, and group homes adopted healthier food service standards, and media campaigns led to a sharp drop in the consumption of sugary beverages by kids. The efforts have worked to lower childhood obesity, particularly among minorities, and halt the increase of adult obesity for the first time in decades.

Our annual *Culture of Health Prize* honors communities that are pursuing better health locally by creating new and powerful partnerships. Twenty diverse communities have won the Prize since 2013—from the Bronx in New York City, to Williamson, W.Va., in Appalachian coal country, to the Taos Pueblo tribe in New Mexico. These communities are building momentum by sharing their experiences with others. And it’s these connections that are starting to build a Culture of Health from coast to coast.
But Prize winners are never really done learning. Just months after the win, Wilson tapped the network of other Prize winners to unearth ideas on how to address another need: helping the homeless. This collaboration is not accidental. RWJF organizes a regular call with the now-20 Prize-winning communities. In these “rounds,” they update one another, discuss what they are hearing from other communities and relay how they are spreading the word. “It’s then that you find the commonalities,” Wilson says.

All the Prize communities have become working models of how to cultivate partnerships, drive local change, and ultimately create the architecture for a healthier population. Their specific needs, challenges, demographics, and geography vary greatly, but they share one common vision: Realizing a Culture of Health. This is why they are helping one another embark on new projects while also lending their expertise to communities outside the circle of Prize winners.

On a call last year, Wilson heard that Fall River, Mass., and Santa Cruz County, Calif. (2013 Prize winners), were both tackling homelessness, but in very different ways. Wilson and her colleagues at Priority Spokane—a collaboration of government, academia, business, and nonprofits—used this information to fine-tune their own work. Santa Cruz informed Spokane’s approach to counting its homeless population, while Fall River’s “Parent Cafes” served as a model for getting people to share their challenges.

These types of collaborations are happening more and more. All the Prize-winning communities report that towns and cities across the nation are contacting them to learn about their efforts and to share their own experiences. Wilson has seen first-hand how these community-to-community connections are spreading success.

“These interactions benefit us all by bringing people together,” she says. “Learning what works for others is especially valuable because so many people are doing good things.”

Lyndia Wilson has been both teacher and student in the Culture of Health Prize world. As division director at Spokane Regional Health District in the state of Washington, she was a key player in helping Spokane County win the Prize in 2014. The county earned the distinction in part by linking health with education and paving a path forward to break the intergenerational cycles of poverty and poor health.
The programs we fund aim to cultivate effective partnerships between hospitals and communities; examine how the delivery of care can be improved to meet the needs of local residents; and provide greater access to health care and coverage for everyone.

This area of our work also underscores our continued support of the expansion of Medicaid at the state level, as well as programs that help everyone in America obtain health insurance.

One initiative that reflects the transformation we seek is the BUILD Health Challenge. It is a national award program supporting “bold, upstream, integrated, local, and data-driven” (BUILD) community health interventions in low-income, urban neighborhoods. The Challenge aims to strengthen partnerships among local nonprofit organizations, hospitals and health systems, and local health departments to improve the health and well-being of communities. It is funded by RWJF, the Colorado Health Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, the de Beaumont Foundation, and the for-profit Advisory Board Company.

Transforming Health and Health Care Systems

RWJF remains deeply committed to improving America’s health care system, and increasing the coordination between care, cost, prevention, and decision-making.
But in recent years, the corridor has had to deal with serious economic challenges including the loss of several major employers, disruptive highway construction, drug-related violence, and rising rates of poverty. Many middle-class families have moved away and today almost one-third of the area’s 8,000 residents live below the poverty line. The health challenges that residents face are so great that babies born and raised in the community can expect to live 14 fewer years than those just a few miles away in the Oakland hills. The **BUILD Health Challenge** is working to improve both the economic and physical health of the community through collective action.

Funded by RWJF, the Advisory Board Company, the de Beaumont Foundation, the Colorado Health Foundation and The Kresge Foundation—the BUILD (Bold, Upstream, Integrated, Local, and Data-Driven) initiative focuses on strengthening partnerships among local hospitals and health systems, nonprofit organizations, and local health departments to improve the health and well-being of their communities.

In 2015, BUILD awarded 18 grants across the nation, totaling up to $8.5 million. One of those grants went to the East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation (EBALDC), whose San Pablo Area Revitalization Collaborative (SPARC) effort is focused on improving all aspects of residents’ health: community safety, affordable housing, accessible healthy food and local economic and workforce growth.

To make Oakland’s San Pablo area a new hub of health, BUILD supports these SPARC goals:

- Preventing and controlling high blood pressure among residents to reduce emergency room and hospitalization rates for those at risk by 10 percent by 2018.
- Transforming blighted hot spots in the community into safe, open spaces; beautifying areas marred by vandalism, graffiti, and illegal dumping.
- Developing a plan to increase the number of affordable housing units to 2 percent of total housing stock and secure housing protections.
- Making San Pablo Avenue a vibrant business corridor once more.

The integrated approach of SPARC and BUILD empowers local residents to build the relationships they need to work together for a healthier future.

The area known as the San Pablo Avenue corridor in Oakland, Calif., was once a bustling hub of business and African-American culture dubbed the “Harlem of the West.”
Leadership for Better Health

Albert Einstein is often quoted as saying, “We cannot solve our problems by using the same thinking that we used to create them.” To build a Culture of Health, our nation needs diverse leaders who are eager to drive change by accepting risk, working across disciplines, and drawing inspiration through collaboration.

We have initiated four new leadership programs to develop, train, and network these new agents of change. A select group of organizations have been working with us to co-develop the programs, which began recruitment in February and will launch later this year. The programs and organizations are:

**HEALTH POLICY RESEARCH SCHOLARS**
(led by Johns Hopkins University): Providing doctoral students from underrepresented and/or disadvantaged populations training in health policy, health equity, and population health, with the goal of implementing change in communities across the nation and influencing the broader conversation about health.

**INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH LEADERS**
(led by University of Minnesota): Connecting researchers and community members through networked teams to spur on-the-ground change that puts evidence-based research into action.

**CULTURE OF HEALTH LEADERS**
(led by the National Collaborative for Health Equity, a project of the New Venture Fund): Developing a diverse group of leaders representing key sectors influencing health—such as education, transportation, public health, public policy, business, health care, community development, and urban planning—with the goal of achieving health equity through collaborative and cross-disciplinary solutions.

**CLINICAL SCHOLARS**
(led by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill): Establishing highly networked groups of seasoned, professional clinicians—physicians, nurses, pharmacists, and others—and providing them with the coaching and collaboration they need to drive transformative change in communities across the country.

As part of our focus on cross-sector leadership, the Foundation will also work alongside business and industry to encourage the development of healthier workplaces, goods and services that encourage health, and stronger ties between companies and the communities they serve.
The Action Framework

If the Themes represent what the Foundation does, the Action Framework outlines how we and our partners are doing it: Inviting people across the nation to join forces, across sectors, to put the Culture of Health vision into action.
Drawn from thorough research, analysis, and iteration, the Action Framework was developed by RWJF in collaboration with the RAND Corporation, and with input from more than 1,000 experts, partners, focus group participants, and global leaders over an 18-month period.

Everyone who worked on this project was driven by one question: “What is holding our nation back from the health to which we aspire?”

What we discovered is that our nation is not addressing the interdependence of the many social, economic, physical, and environmental factors of health and well-being. Therefore, the Framework is grounded in four interconnected Action Areas that demonstrate how health and well-being is the sum of many parts:

1. Making Health a Shared Value
2. Fostering Cross-Sector Collaboration to Improve Well-Being
3. Creating Healthier, More Equitable Communities
4. Strengthening Integration of Health Services and Systems

Together, these Action Areas are intended to achieve an outcome of improved population health, well-being, and equity.
Each Action Area includes a set of corresponding Drivers. These are long-term priorities that we hope individuals and organizations across sectors will focus on to accelerate change, both nationally and at the community level. Together, the Action Areas and the Drivers create the key building blocks of the Action Framework that will remain constant over time.

In addition, the Framework includes 41 national, evidence-based Measures, selected as points of assessment and engagement. The Measures are not limited to traditional health indicators; instead, they encourage us to think of health in broader ways, incorporating all aspects of well-being.

The Action Framework will guide RWJF’s investments over the next 20 years. And while we plan to fund work in all four of the Action Areas, we will not focus on every aspect of the four. We recognize that we are just one of many organizations working toward the common cause of improving health in America. And we hope the Action Framework will shine a light on the transformative roles everyone can play in this national effort.

The examples on the following pages highlight how organizations across America are connecting with the Action Framework and inspiring creative partnerships.
This Action Area encourages placing our nation’s health goals front and center; increasing the demand for healthy places and practices; and promoting social connections that foster a sense of security, belonging, and trust in our communities. Measures such as volunteer engagement, sense of community, and the number of tweets about wellness (relative to illness and acute care) can help us gauge how we’re doing as a nation in this Area.

Dr. Georges C. Benjamin, executive director of the American Public Health Association (APHA), is spearheading this sort of action through APHA’s Generation Public Health. It is a national movement of people, communities, and organizations working together to create the healthiest nation in one generation.

AARP is working to disrupt our nation’s mindset and expectations of aging. One example of their efforts is the Livability Index, which measures the quality of life in American communities for people of all ages.
This Area involves bringing actors to the table who have typically considered themselves outside the health arena. Measures within this Area include the level of business support for workplace health, the percentage of full-time officers engaged in community policing, and health policies that support working families.

For example, The Dow Chemical Company has taken a leadership role in the Michigan Health Improvement Alliance, a group of diverse stakeholders working to improve health in central Michigan, where Dow is headquartered. Not only does this initiative benefit the community as a whole, but it has been an important part of Dow’s overall health strategy contributing to their priorities of better health, better quality, and better value. Dow’s health strategy has successfully driven a decrease in chronic disease among its employees. In fact, a recent study demonstrated that Dow spent 17 percent less than its peers on chronic health conditions.

The American Heart Association recently unveiled the Workplace Health Achievement Index, piloted by its CEO Roundtable. Recognizing the connections between employee health, company performance, and the well-being of the broader community, the Index provides employers with best practices and a rigorous standard to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of workplace health offerings.
In order to truly build a Culture of Health, we cannot leave anyone behind. Unfortunately, well-being in America can be unduly and unequally influenced by geographic, demographic, and social factors.

The goal of this Action Area is to encourage communities to fulfill their greatest health potential by improving the environment in which residents live, learn, work, and play. We will track progress through Measures such as access to healthy foods, the prevalence of Complete Streets policies, and the percentage of youth who feel safe walking to and from school.

For instance, in Ypsilanti, Mich., the Deborah Strong Housing complex is poised to be a game-changer. It’s the inaugural project of the Strong Families Fund, a new $70 million pay-for-performance financing initiative that pairs social services with quality, affordable housing for low-income families. Spearheaded by RWJF, the Kresge Foundation, KeyBank, and Goldman Sachs, the Strong Families Fund joins with local organizations to connect residents with a network of resources including job training, after-school programs, and health care services. The Fund is tracking the gains that stable housing and coordinated social services bring to residents’ lives, with a focus on health and wellness; work, income, and assets; housing stability; youth and education; and community/neighborhood engagement.

Through its community development initiatives, the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco is working to connect organizations across the health and housing sectors—and broadening the conversation about the many factors that influence well-being.
Strengthening Integration of Health Services and Systems

This Action Area aims to better integrate medical treatment with public health and social services. It stresses improving the consumer experience and examining the role of health care as part of a larger network of partners. Measures within this Area include consumer experience across hospital, ambulatory, and home health settings, the prevalence of electronic medical record linkages, and access to mental health services as well as treatment for substance dependence or abuse.

For example, Spartanburg Regional Healthcare System in South Carolina formed a partnership with 10 community organizations to create AccessHealth Spartanburg, designed to connect low-income, uninsured people to health care and address barriers to health services. By better coordinating primary care and focusing on the social issues that affect health—such as transportation, access to medications, housing, and employment—the program reduced hospital costs for the targeted population by 42 percent and hospital admissions by 31 percent. This is one part of a community-wide health movement that earned Spartanburg County a 2015 Culture of Health Prize.

The American Hospital Association understands the importance of hospital partnerships that advance the health of the communities they serve.
Building a Culture of Health requires a steadfast commitment to long-range goals that we can envision and achieve together.

The Action Framework is designed to give special attention to equity, creating conditions and opportunities that enable individuals to flourish physically, mentally, and socially throughout their lifespan.

By joining forces within and across the four Action Areas, we can place well-being at the center of every aspect of American life.
As we continue to concentrate on building a Culture of Health in America, an African proverb of which I’m fond comes to mind: “Walking alone leaves a narrow footprint.” We are honored to be walking beside you on this journey, and we want to hear about your experiences and your challenges. We also hope that you will encourage others to join the movement.

Please invite your neighbors, your co-workers, your faith communities, and others to visit www.CultureofHealth.org, where they’ll find stories about the different ways people and communities are putting the Culture of Health vision into action:

Stories about communities like Bridgeport, Conn. where residents, policymakers, and community organizations came together to turn an abandoned, unsafe, and contaminated site into a thriving, two-acre urban farm where neighbors gather and school kids learn about nutrition and food production.

We want www.CultureofHealth.org to start new conversations about what is possible. We want it to be a place to share ideas, triumphs, and struggles. And we want it to spark innovative and unconventional ways of thinking and working together to build a healthier future for all.

And so, we are using it to issue a challenge to you and all of our allies in this cause: To think bigger. To act more boldly. To join forces and build momentum with unlikely partners.

We are asking you to step out of your comfort zone, and team up with those who see health from a different perspective. Because that’s the only way we are going to spread the movement and create a greater sense of shared accountability. And it’s how, as a nation, we will build a Culture of Health that benefits everyone, now and for generations to come.
Notes