

FURTHER TOGETHER: Stories of Systems Change

PARTNERING WITH COMMUNITY TO FIGHT COVID DISPARITIES



From the pandemic's earliest days, it was clear that COVID-19's impact was especially devastating for L.A. County's residents of color. Risk factors such as large households and front-line jobs were exacerbated by the impact of generations of structural racism. The result: Mass testing and vaccine sites that were far from home, inaccessible by public transit, and closed when hourly workers could get there. A vaccine registration system that required Internet access and tech savvy beyond the reach of many. And a general wariness of government resulting in misinformation spreading like wildfire.

The County Departments of Public Health (DPH) and Health Services (DHS) were aware of these disparities but stretched too thin to tackle them alone. Philanthropy was eager to pitch in, and additional funds were soon pouring in from the federal and state governments. However, no mechanisms existed to orchestrate the distribution of emergency funds to ensure aid reached those who needed it most.

Missing from these early conversations were the voices of those most affected, and those closest to them: "the cultural ambassadors in community that could talk in a way that many of the vulnerable community members would naturally trust and recognize as familiar," noted Anthony Iton, Senior Vice President of Healthy Communities, California Endowment. Connections between the County and these essential ambassadors were few and far between.



"Having the vaccination site at our church allowed us to support our members and ease their fears. We made phone calls and sent emails to encourage our members to come and bring their families. Since we had an existing relationship, we would hold hands with people and literally walk and talk with them at every station of the process. It really eased their minds and provided that safety net that was necessary to protect them from the virus."

— Church representative



SOLUTION: Connecting the County with Highly Impacted Communities

The Center for Strategic Partnerships, with its deep relationships in both the public and private sectors, was uniquely positioned to help coordinate efforts to deploy resources in highly impacted communities.

The first step was to enhance communication and coordination among funders. With support from the California Endowment and the Ballmer Group, in September 2020 director Kate Anderson brought in consultant Manal Aboelata of the Prevention Institute to help DHS and DPH develop a joint plan for COVID response. The Center also established the COVID Equity Roundtable, a place where funders could meet to gain a clearer, collective picture of the resources flowing into the County and where they were going. This forum, which ultimately engaged more than 200 agencies, helped avoid unintentional duplication of effort and ensure a more equitable distribution of funds.

At the same time, Public Health Institute had begun pooling donations from various philanthropic organizations to create a statewide COVID relief fund called Together Toward Health (TTH). Leveraging the Center's existing relationships and infrastructure, L.A. became the first county in California to access these flexible funds.

L.A. ultimately secured three TTH grants totaling more than \$3 million. Most of these funds were distributed through low-barrier, flexible grants to community- and faith-based organizations to support COVID outreach and education, system navigation, testing, and vaccine promotion in the County's hardest-hit communities. Finding these groups required painstaking effort and hours on the phone, by Center consultant Olivia Celis, Board of Supervisors' staff, and others, asking: "Who is already doing great work in these communities? How can we reach them?" Due to the tremendous response and success of the grants, TTH funds were eventually supplemented with additional grants from the Sierra Health, Annenberg, Specialty Family, Conrad N. Hilton, and Eli and Edythe Broad Foundations.

"Since the beginning of our pandemic response, it has been abundantly clear that to effectively connect with our most vulnerable and hard-to-reach communities, it would take a comprehensive response beyond County departments. The Center for Strategic Partnerships played a pivotal role in leveraging its connections with trusted community messengers and faith-based organizations, as well as with philanthropy partners, to build the capacity for this critical outreach."

— Los Angeles County Supervisor **Hilda L. Solis**,
First District.



IMPACT


The grants created a wide-reaching array of community-based staff and volunteers, armed with the most accurate information available, as well as the cultural expertise and relationships needed to win the community's trust, through:

- **Prevention education.** An initial round of grants to community-based organizations (CBOs) supported outreach during the pandemic's early days. In place of government representatives and official-sounding flyers, community members encountered familiar faces handing out masks, talking to neighbors door-to-door, setting up folding tables at events and grocery stores, and spreading the word through popular radio programs and social media messages in multiple languages.
- **System navigation.** During the pandemic there were many County programs offering help with basic needs—from food to rental assistance to mobile hotspots. However, funds for these programs were quickly depleted, and information about them did not always reach the County's most disenfranchised citizens in time. The volunteers and staff funded through these grants helped get the word out quickly to communities in greatest need of help.
- **Vaccine promotion.** When clinics in high-risk communities saw that people from other neighborhoods were driving long distances to get the shots while locals stayed away, additional Center grants helped bridge gaps in accessibility and trust. In addition to providing larger clinics with infrastructure funds to ensure that local community members could access vaccines, small grants (\$5,000 or less) were provided to grassroots CBOs and faith-based organizations (FBOs) to host clinics at their own sites, where residents already felt comfortable. These grants helped with outreach, enrollment, registration, and logistics; offered gift card incentives; secured food and music to make it a neighborhood event; and arranged for other forms of assistance such as grocery distribution, health assessments, or legal help.

One community member said, "I knew I needed the vaccine, but I was waiting to see how other people fared. When I saw the signs at the church about it, I decided to go talk to the nurses. Because I trust the church, and I get much-needed groceries every month from them, I decided to get my first vaccine!"

In the fall, similar grants partnered CBOs with school-based vaccination sites. These grants helped keep many of these sites open during a wave of Omicron-related staffing shortages. As the threat of COVID and vaccine disparities persist, the Center will continue to utilize trusted networks to bring vaccines to disproportionately impacted communities with additional funding from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation.




\$2.5M
IN FUNDING

for more equitable access to the COVID-19 vaccine and vital community health services.




450K+
INDIVIDUALS

were connected to COVID-19 services in 160 of the County's most disenfranchised ZIP codes.




277
GRANTS

to CBOs and FBOs supporting vaccine equity in communities of color.



“Working with grassroots and community churches has helped the Annenberg Foundation to get the word out to a number of the hardest hit communities. The Center’s collaborative work enabled us to reach many more of these groups than we could on our own.”

— **Cinny Kennard**, Executive Director of the Annenberg Foundation

THE ROAD AHEAD

The disparities in COVID-19 outcomes have grimly underscored the importance of equitable health care that reaches beyond hospital and clinic walls, into communities, neighborhoods, and homes. This experience has also demonstrated the value of engaging and collaborating with the communities that we aim to serve. Community health workers (CHWs), also referred to as *promotoras* or community well-being workers, offer an effective way to improve both individual wellness and neighborhood economic development. The COVID equity grants greatly increased the scope of this work in L.A. County and provided inspiration to continue this network of community-based outreach.

INITIATIVE PARTNERS

Center Consultants:

- Olivia Celis

Public Partners:

- L.A. County Department of Public Health
- Los Angeles County Health Services
- L.A. County Department of Mental Health

Private and Community Partners

- Annenberg Foundation
- Ballmer Group
- Blue Shield of California Foundation
- The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation
- The California Endowment
- California Health Care Foundation
- California Wellness Foundation
- Conrad N. Hilton Foundation
- Prevention Institute
- Public Health Institute
- Sierra Health Foundation
- Specialty Family Foundation

That’s why the Center is teaming up with the L.A. County health departments, Alliance for Health Integration, and three health foundations—The California Endowment, California Wellness Foundation, and Blue Shield Foundation of California—to lay the groundwork for a publicly funded, county-wide, integrated community-based public health infrastructure. This work, both in community and within the County, seeks to create a vision and framework for sustaining a vibrant and sustainable CHW infrastructure that can be quickly mobilized to address pressing community needs.

Philanthropic support allowed us to bring on Vision y Compromiso to complete a census of L.A. County CHWs, conduct a landscape analysis of what other jurisdictions around the nation are doing to support a thriving CHW workforce, assemble a community advisory board, and develop a shared vision among County, community, and philanthropic partners.

We welcome additional partners on this exciting project. Please reach out to Olivia Celis at the Center (CSP@ceo.lacounty.gov) with any questions.



- CENTER CORE FUNDERS -

As of December 2022

Private-sector funders

Annenberg Foundation	Conrad N. Hilton Foundation
Ballmer Group	LA Partnership for Early Childhood Investment
Blue Shield of California Foundation	The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation
David Bohnett Foundation	Pritzker Foster Care Initiative
California Community Foundation	Reissa Foundation
The California Endowment	The Rose Hills Foundation
Casey Family Programs	Specialty Family Foundation
Cedars-Sinai	United Way of Greater Los Angeles
The Carol and James Collins Foundation	Weingart Foundation
The Carl & Roberta Deutsch Foundation	Wells Fargo
The Fineshriber Family Foundation	
First 5 LA	

Public-sector funders

Aging and Disabilities Department
 Department of Arts and Culture
 Department of Children and Family Services
 Department of Consumer and Business Affairs
 Department of Economic Opportunity
 Department of Health Services
 Department of Mental Health
 Department of Public Health
 Department of Public Social Services
 Probation Department
 Department of Youth Development

- CENTER ADVISORY COUNCIL -

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John Wagner, First 5 LA
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