

November 5, 2018

The Honorable Jerome M. Adams, MD  
United States Surgeon General  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, S.W. Humphrey Building, Suite 701H  
Washington, DC 20201

Attn.: Martin J. Vincent  
Re: Docket No. CDC-2018-0082

Dear Dr. Adams:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the upcoming Surgeon General's document/Call to Action with a working title "Community Health and Prosperity," published in the Federal Register on September 6, 2018.

Please note that these comments have not been submitted to or approved by NeighborWorks America's board and do not necessarily represent the views of its board members, either collectively or as individuals. These comments have been formed based on the ongoing work of NeighborWorks America with our network of roughly 245 local and regional nonprofit-affiliated NeighborWorks organizations.

For 40 years, Neighborhood Reinvestment Corp. (d/b/a NeighborWorks America), a Congressionally-chartered, national, nonpartisan nonprofit, has created opportunities for people to improve their lives and strengthen their communities by providing access to homeownership and safe, affordable rental housing. We have also led work bridging the gap between the housing, community development and health fields to bring more investments by the private sectors and policy makers in community health.

In the last five years, NeighborWorks organizations have generated more than \$34 billion in reinvestment in their communities. In FY 2017, the NeighborWorks network created 22,700 homeowners, owned or managed 165,500 high-quality rental homes, and provided home-ownership education and counseling for 181,400 customers. During that year, the network also helped 866,498 residents to access healthy food; engaged 118,695 residents in health and wellness activities; provided afterschool and other educational resources to 67,452 children and youth; and led workforce development initiatives serving 30,416 residents.

## NeighborWorks' Approach

Our commitment to building health has its roots in forty years of work in disinvested communities. In 1978, NeighborWorks America was created to build community-driven solutions to stabilize and strengthen neighborhoods. In addition to providing homeownership and lending services, NeighborWorks organizations lead community building and engagement, community revitalization and financial security strategies. NeighborWorks America and its network demonstrate the power of collective responses to disparities in communities, particularly in low-income communities where health suffers. NeighborWorks invests in the leadership and organizational capacity of our network and the broader field to leverage core housing and community development strengths to build health and prosperity.

Responding to expressed priorities from our network, NeighborWorks America has continued to deepen its focus on comprehensive community development—and the ways in which it builds community health and well-being. After our launch of our 2017-2021 strategic plan, NeighborWorks has had an expanded focus on place-based, multi-sector collaboration to improve quality of life in underinvested communities. We updated our comprehensive community development theory of change to guide our support for strategies that realize outcomes for people, place and local community systems. The social determinants of health were a crucial frame for this work.

## Focus on Health: Making Investment and Building Partnerships

Over the last five years, NeighborWorks has deepened our focus on community health through multiple initiatives.

- NeighborWorks launched the [Healthy Homes and Communities Initiative](#), designed to leverage corporate capacity to promote health and well-being through comprehensive community development.
- NeighborWorks embarked upon a systematic effort to evaluate health outcomes associated with community development, led by [Success Measures](#), an evaluation social enterprise hosted at NeighborWorks America.
- NeighborWorks partnered with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the County Health Rankings Roadmap Program to build the next generation of cross-sector leaders.
- NeighborWorks developed new and enhanced existing capacity-building tools, including training, learning communities, and symposia.

## Launching the Healthy Homes and Communities Initiative

Recognizing the integral connection between health and community development, NeighborWorks launched the Healthy Homes and Communities Initiative in 2014. To ground our work in practice, we surveyed our membership on their work at the nexus of health, housing, and community development. These results revealed the NeighborWorks network was already prioritizing health at levels greater than expected, but also highlighted opportunities for additional impact. Preliminary results were published as a [working paper](#) with Harvard's Joint Center on Housing. [Final results](#), including three case studies, were published in peer-reviewed journal "Cities and Health". The County Health Rankings and Roadmaps Program [highlighted](#) this work, in association with examples from Texas and Oregon where NeighborWorks organizations are promoting health and prosperity through housing-based strategies.

## Healthy Communities Demonstration Project

In 2015, NeighborWorks America, County Health Rankings & Roadmaps and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) developed a [collaboration](#) to support systemic network weaving, capacity-building, and investment to catalyze local action to support health and well-being. By pairing investments from RWJF with grant funds from NeighborWorks, we were able to fund 28 network organizations to develop and implement community and data driven strategies to improve health outcomes. Collectively, we entitled this effort the Healthy Communities Demonstration Project.

Engaging approximately 43,000 residents in urban, rural and suburban communities, the project yielded measurable improvements in community health and well-being. Organizations documented improvements in safety, housing stability, financial security, neighborhood conditions, food security and other key determinants of health. Health outcomes and costs -- including respiratory health, self-reported health, obesity, emergency department usage and hospital readmissions -- similarly have shown improvements.

Despite documented barriers to health care and other services in rural communities, many participating organizations led innovative strategies to promote health and prosperity in a rural setting. In Florida, Rural Neighborhood Inc. applied healthy homes principals in their rehab of an affordable rental community as well as building new community gardens and recreational space designed to promote social connectedness and active living. In New Hampshire, Lakes Region Community Developers launched a multi-layered strategy to respond to childhood obesity by supporting greater access to healthy food in their rental communities.

## Case Studies

Early learnings, including case examples from Texas, Massachusetts, Florida and California, were shared through [articles](#) and [webinars](#). A key findings report and three case studies are forthcoming, featuring: 1) a partnership between Willamette Neighborhood Housing Services and a Medicaid provider in Oregon that has reduced emergency department visits and costs; 2) a successful effort to support seniors to age in their homes, led by Community Housing Partners in Virginia; and 3) evidence-informed strategies to respond to trauma and promote healing led by New Kensington Community Development Corporation and other local partners in Pennsylvania.

## Health Outcomes Demonstration Project

In 2016, [the Health Outcomes Demonstration Project](#) was launched as a three-year national initiative addressing the challenges practitioners face in demonstrating the impact of their housing and community development programs on resident and community health. Jointly implemented by Success Measures at NeighborWorks America and Enterprise Community Partners, the project provides evaluation technical assistance, grant funding, peer learning, and health measurement tools to 20 nonprofits across the country to help measure and document health outcomes in low- and moderate-income communities.

The project is piloting a new set of data collection tools specifically designed by Success Measures to help practitioners gather evidence that establishes the links between their work and improved health outcomes, so they can improve programs and strategically target resources. These 68 measurement tools, which focus on the changes in resident attitudes, behaviors and beliefs, are available to the field in [Measuring Health Outcomes: Success Measures Evaluation Tools for Community Development and Health](#). A feature article in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's [PD&R EDGE magazine](#) discussed the measurement tools and how they are currently being used in Lane County, Oregon.

The demonstration project, which runs until June 2019, will disseminate its findings nationally across the community development and health fields as an important contribution toward reducing health disparities and improving health for all Americans. The initiative is supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, NeighborWorks America, Enterprise Community Partners, The Hearst Foundation, Inc., the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and by in-kind support from the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco.

## Training and Other Capacity-Building

Capacity-building -- through training, peer-to-peer learning, and technical assistance -- are core components of our work to promote community health and well-being. NeighborWorks Training Institutes include dozens of [courses](#) that build the skills and knowledge that underpin healthy homes and communities.

In 2018, we launched two national learning communities, comprised of network organizations, to promote community health and well-being. The first learning community is developing a comprehensive approach for community development organizations to address trauma and promote healing. The second learning community is helping community development organizations to build health partnerships and evaluate their impact, by developing and adapting existing tools to local contexts. When these learning communities complete in 2019, we will share learnings widely.

## What We've Learned

NeighborWorks' comprehensive community development approach has resulted in new learnings and resources to promote health and prosperity in the communities served by our network organizations.

- Community-development organizations are applying a health lens and evaluating the health outcomes of a broad range of strategies: housing, community revitalization, financial capability, economic development, food security, violence prevention, public safety, and social services.
- Community development organizations have effectively partnered with local entities to reprioritize prevention and the upstream social determinants of health at a community level.
- Cross sectoral dialogue helped community development organizations to join and lead partnerships, identify shared priorities, align resources, design joint initiatives, adapt data systems and reimagine evaluation.
- Community development organizations are able to effectively improve key determinants of health and health outcomes, from safety to obesity.
- In a new and emerging field, we need to provide tools, investment, training and other capacity-building to strengthen promising practices.

## Moving Forward: A National Convening

The arc of NeighborWorks' history reflects a consistent focus on building local leadership to respond to critical community needs and priorities. A more explicit, deeper

focus on community health and well-being reflects the natural growth and development of this history.

As the capstone to five years of intentional focus on health, we will convene a national symposia on August 21, 2019 to highlight bright spots and best practices in the community development field. This symposia will unite national and local leaders to celebrate progress and identify new opportunities to promote health and prosperity. We welcome participation by the U.S. Surgeon General and colleagues at this symposia in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Even as the community development field increasingly embraces its role in building community health and well-being, place-based differences in health outcomes persist. NeighborWorks America, in partnership with the NeighborWorks network of community development organizations, will continue to help build a healthier, more prosperous America. Our commitment to data collection, evaluation, capacity building and broad sharing of the learnings will remain deeply embedded in our work to bridge housing and health needs in our communities.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment. We look forward to sharing with you our three case studies on the Healthy Communities Demonstration Project in early 2019.

Sincerely,



Marietta Rodriguez  
President & Chief Executive Officer  
NeighborWorks America