Micro-Mapping: A Focused Approach for Better Neighborhood Health

HOW TO CLOSE GAPS BLOCK-BY-BLOCK

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Introduction

California is the fifth-largest economy in the world. We have cities within cities. No place is the same. ***Each community features unique cultures and needs. Similarly, health disparities differ by community and neighborhood.***

It's not just access to medical care that causes these differences. We spend a lot on healthcare as a society, yet 80 percent of our health factors exist outside the doctor's office and inside our homes, schools, jobs and neighborhoods.

With the right lens, we can tighten health gaps with precision.
The answer is a ***two-step process.***

Step 1

Micro-mapping by neighborhood, even block-by-block, to identify:

- What health gaps exist — in preventative care and care outcomes
- What factors appear to drive those gaps

Step 2

Use the micro-mapping data to create place-based solutions. It begins when we shift our investments to the neighborhood level and partner with local community-based organizations (CBOs) to build place-based solutions to address these drivers and close health equity gaps.

Healthy communities have:

- Good transportation[1]
- Job opportunities[2]
- Clean, safe and affordable housing[3]
- Parks and open space[4]
- Access to fresh, healthy food and clean water
- High-quality education system
- Safe streets

Health Net is one of three California health plans with Health Equity Accreditation Plus (HEA+). Out of nearly 20 plans nationwide with HEA+, Health Net is the only one with the accreditation across Medicaid, Medicare, Commercial and Exchange.

We know it is critical to understand the drivers at the neighborhood level.

Based on our 45 years as a health plan in California, we know that micro-mapping takes a thoughtful and collaborative approach. That coincides with accreditations from the National Committee on Quality Assurance (NCQA) on health equity and multicultural services.

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The Main Benefits of Micro-Mapping and Place-Based Solutions

Our approach recognizes that communities have different needs and assets. With micro-mapping informed strategic place-based solutions, communities can achieve a variety of positive results, including:

1 Improved health outcomes

Tailored, locally-relevant interventions lead to better health outcomes because each neighborhood and demographic group has different needs. We can address specific community issues more effectively with the right tools that fit the landscape. A zoomed-in baseline of health metrics can show where improvements occur or deficiencies exist.

2 Reduced health disparities

With precision, based on data and interactions with community members, we know which areas have significant health disparities. Some of the factors and structural drivers of health inequities are built-in and "spatialized." This means unequal distribution of social, economic and healthcare resources across different areas leads to geographic concentrations of health inequities.

There are no simple solutions to generational and systemic problems. Instead, place-based strategies can do a better job to tackle and enhance health equity for better quality of life and to chart a new course for people in those areas.

3 Sustainable change within the community

Place-based solutions often include Community Health Detailing (CHD) as a key tactic. CHD is a process that involves healthcare professionals who engage residents and experts to identify and understand local health-related social needs.

In this sense, CHD is an equity-focused quality improvement effort. It's aimed at the formation of stronger clinical-community relations to close care gaps within certain ethnic and racial groups.

This grassroots approach helps foster sustainable health improvements which are likely to remain for the long-term. Instead of investments and campaigns that look for instant results, we aim for incremental progress that will last for years and generations to come.

Key Micro-Mapping Principles

Three main components of micro-mapping are to:

Build campaign awareness among partners

Identify provider or organization action items

Complete layered outreach and support to our members

For example, we look at emergency department utilization in a county by provider group, hospital, claims for certain doctors and top diagnoses.

Or, if the focus is on children's health, we can leverage key measurements of the California Department of Health Care Services Bold Goals 50x2025 and analyze health equity scores awarded by National Committee on Quality Assurance.

In either case, we then look at the internal team coordination needed to address gaps, challenges, obstacles and messages to connect with members.

With that alignment, we can identify the key external partners to build awareness, boost local activities, support grants and enable event execution and patient education.

The subsequent strategic plan maps out the:

- Populations of focus
- Quality outcomes
- Type of campaign (direct mail, email, in-person, phone, text or other)
- Actions to engage members
- Lines of business involved
- Allies who will help us tailor the work

The Fundamentals of How to Build Strategic Place-Based Solutions

Drive active participation

We must build trust within communities and that's why we involve community members in the planning, implementation and evaluation of health initiatives. We know historical harms exist within the healthcare system. It matters to build those relationships and recognize the expertise that lives in the community.

When you focus on improved consumer experiences and members see the benefits of care, engagement with providers and how to make decisions for their well-being, you can build trust with community members. As a result, their outcomes can improve. As a form of Community Health Detailing (CHD), our Community Advisory Committees (CACs), provide us input on what we do right and where we can improve.

These CACs empower members to bring their voices to the table to ensure Health Net actively drives interventions and solutions to build more equitable care. The CAC advocates for Health Net members as we remain responsive to their diverse healthcare needs.

For example, Health Net launched a community doula program in 2019. This program was the first of its kind in Medicaid to provide free doula services to Black birthing women in Los Angeles County. We established relationships with two CBOs, Diversity Uplifts and Frontline Doulas. The program served 85 Black mothers over the course of a year and saw a 60% reduction in cesarean/c-section rates.

The program served as a demonstration for Los Angeles County to secure $2 million in federal funds to launch the African American Infant and Maternal Mortality program. Through relationships with local CBOs and services that connected with the needs of mothers in Los Angeles County, many more mothers and children will benefit for years to come.

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Build trust

Provider Engagement, External Affairs and Medi-Cal regional teams can develop strong relationships between residents and local health/social service providers to increase trust and engagement in health programs. Our External Affairs team members join local CBO boards to learn, help and guide. Those organizations invite us to engage and build relationships. That communication helps us to know what benefits a CBO and their audiences via sponsorships and grants.

One of the Bold Goals 50x2025 is to reduce racial/ethnic disparities in well-child visits (WCV) and vaccines by 50 percent. That's why we formed the "3 by 120" campaign (at least two and ideally three WCVs within the first 120 days of life).

From October 2023 to February 2024, Health Net, HealthBegins, along with two CBOs and four federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) in Central and South Central Los Angeles. The CBOs trained in and applied the HealthBegins Community Health Detailing (CHD) approach.

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As part of the campaign, detailers and care team members worked together to assess and understand:

- **Patient barriers to WCVs**
- **How to provide resources to address patients' health-related social needs**
- **How to educate patients on the benefits of WCVs**
- **How to improve patient outreach and follow-up**

We've carried out similar campaigns in Sacramento, San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Tulare counties.

Tailor your interventions

When we design interventions, it's not about solutions to fit an area but the need to understand social, economic and environmental factors in order to address root causes of health disparities.

We know that California's youth adapt through challenges and wanted to find ways to provide them with mental health support. Since schools serve as safe places for education and guidance, we connected with Los Angeles County districts and made Hazel Health's telehealth services available to millions of students.

Students receive help, via telehealth therapy sessions and virtual appointments, with:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Headaches
- Abdominal pain

In other effort, we engage with local partners to ensure that children and their families learn about oral health. At some events, hundreds of children get fluoride varnish applied on-site.

Leverage local strengths

If you want to meet people where they are, it makes a bigger impact when you integrate community assets such as parks, community centers and local businesses into your place-based solutions. Health Net brings our RVs to local meeting spots to help reach people with screenings and educational materials. Some events allow us to finely target our activities, such as Cinco de Mayo, Pride, Juneteenth, back to school and more. That way, we can tie the events in with education and services to help specific populations of focus.

Moreover, our Health Equity, Health Education and Quality Improvement teams hold monthly wellness webinars, share materials at RV events and update members on tools, programs and guides on our websites and portals.

We also listen to our partners and share data along with helpful insights for better quality of life. This can include how to handle nutrition, stress, mindfulness, fitness goals, hygiene and more.

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Strengthen networks

When you are part of the community, it's not about investments and recognition for investments but instead how you cultivate the sense of belonging, encourage social connections and support networks within the community.

Support networks, including those with emotional, behavioral and educational elements, add immense value that help enhance quality of life through accountability and inspiration.

We created a campaign to improve prenatal and postpartum (PPC) rates for Black/African American members in south Los Angeles County. A barrier analysis included disparity data analysis, focus groups and interviews with community leaders and members, Health Net enrollees and providers. We designed and implemented interventions at the member, provider and neighborhood levels.

Member interventions focused on how to leverage Centene's Start Smart for Your Baby case management program to outreach to Black/African American pregnant members in Los Angeles County. Community and provider interventions included a partnership Black Women for Wellness, a local CBO.

Reproductive Justice trainings for Los Angeles area providers focused on maternal and pediatric health. After the project concluded in October 2023, we continued maternal health disparity reduction efforts for the Black/African American. Those efforts include collaboration across departments to utilize the state's Birth Equity population of focus through Enhanced Care Management (ECM).

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ECM is a statewide Medi-Cal benefit available to eligible members with complex needs.

- **ECM includes access to a single lead care manager who provides comprehensive care management and coordinates their health and health-related care and services.**
- It also enables connections to the quality care members need, no matter where members seek care—at the doctor, the dentist, with a social worker or at a community center.

Foster community cohesion

There is greater opportunity for improved health and outcomes across social drivers through togetherness and shared responsibility for each other amongst community members. Isolation has a negative ripple effect. We want as many people engaged as possible and to lift up entire neighborhoods and regions.

Part of this includes forums for where people can learn from each other and share about issues they face. That is where the data matches up with community perspectives to tailor the **micro-mapping** and place-based approaches to what people need.

In a recent campaign, we worked with the Covered California Disparity Reduction Project to address HbA1c management among Latino members with an independent physician association (IPA). A barrier analysis at the member, provider and community level guided intervention designs to improve management of diabetes (HbA1c level < 8; hemoglobin A1C less than 8%).

Member and community interventions included:

- Quarterly educational mailings
- In-home HbA1c diabetes screening kits sent to members
- Health education outreach calls
- A one-stop clinic with the IPA
- Social media outreach campaigns with four posts (in Spanish and English) about diabetes management (diet, exercise, blood glucose) and
- A food bank geo-access map of community food resources

Integrate Services for Members and Improve Alignment Amongst Partners

Adopt a whole person model of care

Within the hierarchy of needs, it makes sense to combine healthcare with social services (housing, education, employment) to address multiple determinants of health at the same time and place.

For example, the Los Angeles General Medical Center Restorative Care Village is a $68.5 million investment to provide a setting for county residents to heal. In 2021, Health Net made a $100,000 grant to support an outdoor green space and art installations at the village to improve psychological health and wellness of clients and residents.

About two-dozen CBOs can connect with people in the village. Thirteen CBOs have physical spaces to connect people with help for activities of daily living (ADL).

The Restorative Care Village provides access to a complete spectrum of clinical care and supportive services on one campus. This includes:

- Recuperative and respite housing
- Mental health care
- Substance use disorder treatment
- Other transitional and support services

Wrap care around what people need

We know from experience that collaboration among healthcare providers, social service agencies, schools and CBOs creates a unified approach to health improvement.

Health Net has invested tens of millions of dollars in recent years to help with housing and street medicine. This includes more than $30 million in Los Angeles County and elsewhere in the state for housing and support services and more than $2 million for street medicine.

Why does this matter? More than 75,000 unhoused people live in L.A. County. More than 45,000 of them live in Los Angeles, according to the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority.

Master leasing refers to a type of lease that gives the lessee the right to control and sublease the property during the lease, while the owner retains its legal title. It's risen in popularity and has recently surfaced as a tool in approaching Los Angeles' affordable housing crisis.

In March 2023, Health Net and L.A. Care Health Plan committed to investments that total $114 million in the state's Housing and Homelessness Incentive Program (HHIP) over multiple years. The Los Angeles County Homeless Initiative act as the central body to coordinate that funding to help address homelessness in Los Angeles.

Of the total investment, $55.6 million goes to unit acquisition, with a goal of leases on at least 1,700 housing units for tenant-based voucher holders in the private rental market.

Examples of How Place-Based Solutions Might Look and Work in Your Neighborhood

There are multiple ways to improve urban environments. Better quality of life includes enhanced health through:

- **Walkable neighborhoods**
- **Reduced pollution**
- **Access to public transportation**
- **Housing conditions that reduce exposure to environmental hazards**
- **Access to healthy food options through community gardens, farmers' markets and partnerships with local grocery stores**

We've invested in food security programs and more to align with what communities need. We coordinate with Community Health Workers (CHWs) and CBOs to align with when members of the community can benefit from these efforts.

Community schools

Schools provide education, health services, social support and community activities to address multiple drivers of health in one place. We team up with school districts, CBOs and state and local programs to ensure students and their families have what they need.

This includes backpack and supplies drives, promotion of summer meals (like SUN Bucks which gives eligible families a card they can use to buy nutritious food when school is out of session) and safe places for kids to play and do homework.

Blue Zone projects

A Blue Zone is where people live longer and healthier. Community-wide initiatives encourage healthy lifestyles through physical activity, nutrition and social engagement.

Health Net has worked with CBOs and providers to make Community Supports (CS) more available to members. CS address members' health-related social needs, help them live healthier lives and avoid higher, costlier levels of care. This is a top priority under CalAIM.

Health Net expanded these efforts with outreach to members, pharmacies and providers/specialists, which results in referrals for members to CS, including medically tailored meals and asthma remediation. This aligns with the DHCS Bold Goals 50x2025 and key health equity measures by the National Committee on Quality Assurance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, micro-mapping and place-based solutions are essential tools to address health disparities at the neighborhood level.

When we understand the unique needs and assets of each community, we can develop tailored interventions that lead to better health outcomes and reduce disparities. This approach ensures that healthcare efforts are precisely targeted, they're more effective to help people with chronic conditions and other health issues that vary from one area to another.

For example, we work with local organizations to align continuity of care from pregnancy through the first four months of life as we:

- Promote case management through Start Smart for Your Baby
- Support community doula services for Black women and
- Increase WCVs for Black children in Los Angeles

Place-based strategies not only improve health outcomes but also foster sustainable change within communities. When we involve community members to plan and implement health initiatives, we build trust and leverage local resources to create improvements that last.

These efforts include initiatives like:

- Hazel Health telehealth services in schools and
- Partnerships with CBOs to provide comprehensive care at clinics, restorative care villages and community events

Such interventions address the root causes of health disparities and promote overall well-being.

Furthermore, we can achieve health equity through integrated healthcare with social services and stronger community networks. Collaboration among healthcare providers, social service agencies, schools and CBOs creates a unified approach to health improvement. When we take on multiple drivers of health together, that can lead to healthier, more vibrant communities.

Through these efforts, we can ensure that everyone, regardless of their background or where they live, has the opportunity to lead a healthy life.

[1] https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/the-state-of-transportation-and-health-equity/

[2] https://opr.ca.gov/docs/OPR_C6_final.pdf

[3] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7146083/

[4] https://www.apha.org/policies-and-advocacy/public-health-policy-statements/policy-database/2022/01/10/ensuring-equity-in-transportation

[5] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6650883/

[6] https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2016-02/documents/cleanwaterrulefactsheet.pdf

[7] https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives/education-access-and-quality

[8] https://www.cdc.gov/transportation/healthy-community-design.html

[9] https://www.diversityuplifts.org/

[10] https://www.frontlinedoulas.com/

[11] https://www.first5la.org/african-american-infant-and-maternal-mortality-aaimm/

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