

The Problem is Inadequate Support for the Underserved;

New Initiative Strives to Be Part of the Solution

By Jack Ludmir, MD

Malnourished children. Mothers-to-be with no prenatal care. Soaring infant mortality rates. Entire communities without access to doctors or medicine. A prevalence of domestic violence and crime violence. An atmosphere of fear and terror. I've been to several developing countries, but what I've just described is not Haiti or El Salvador, it is Philadelphia.

Philadelphia is the poorest city in the United States, with more than 25 percent of its residents living below the poverty line. Of the country's 10 major cities, it has the highest rates of obesity, smoking, HIV, low birthweight babies, and maternal mortality, and more than 20 percent of the city's population has no access to enough affordable, nutritious food. To make matters worse, there is a serious lack of available healthcare in poverty-stricken communities.

At the same time, Philadelphia has areas of incredible wealth, and it is home to prestigious institutes of higher learning, many philanthropic organizations and businesses, and generous private citizens. And now it also hosts a new determination and a novel plan to help the underserved: The Philadelphia Collaborative for Health Equity (PCHE, or the Collaborative), an innovative initiative to bring together major entities committed to social responsibility throughout the city.

Poverty, lack of affordable healthcare, hunger... These are not just Philadelphia issues, these are social issues we are seeing in cities and towns in every state in America. Other organizations in the country have tried



to address the problem—and failed. That is because those programs worked from the top down, with organization leaders deciding the plan of action. PCHE is a grassroots movement that focuses on the community's input and ideas; the community is at the center of the initiative, and the community will drive the direction of the Collaborative.



By employing the Collective Impact Model, PCHE is setting the standard on how to address—and perhaps solve—some of our most challenging social issues. The model tackles deeply entrenched and complex social problems through an alliance of government, business, philanthropic and nonprofit organizations, and citizens. It is designed to use a cooperative approach to achieve significant and lasting change, and is based on the premise that no single policy, program, or

entity can solve society's increasingly complicated problems. In order to find comprehensive solutions and enact change, all members of society must work side by side.

In Philadelphia, your ZIP code can determine more about how long you live than your DNA code. Those in neighborhoods of deep poverty live 10–20 years fewer than those in more affluent areas. The Collaborative's goal is to narrow that gap and ensure that

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an individual's health is not a barrier for improving his or her life. Our mission is to leverage health as a catalyst to help every family reach its full potential by employing strategies to address the social and built environments that poorer residents live in and empower them to pursue healthier lifestyles and behaviors.

This is not a Jefferson initiative, although Jefferson is a big part of it—this is a Philadelphia initiative to reach out to improve the lives of those who so desperately need help. By working together, we can make a difference.

For more information on the Philadelphia Collaborative for Health Equity and how to become involved, contact Erin Morton, associate director of development, Philadelphia Collaborative for Health Equity, at Erin.Morton@jefferson.edu or 215-955-9418.



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