

## Community Priority

# Healthy and Strong Communities

Together, we care for our neighbors.

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We work for equitable access, use, and quality of healthcare, expanding collaborations that address social determinants of health, workforce needs, healthcare costs, and the overall health and well-being of all Rhode Islanders.

Through deep engagement and discussion with the public, collaboration with our partners, research, and data analysis, we identified a set of community priorities that are essential for a thriving Rhode Island - **Civic and Cultural Life, Climate Action and Sustainability, Education and Student Success, Healthy and Strong Communities, and Housing and Economic Mobility.**

These priorities were consistently voiced by the community we serve and will guide our efforts in the years ahead. As the state's community foundation, we will continue to address Rhode Island's most pressing needs and advance promising solutions, with an eye for equity and a heart for all.

Access to high-quality, affordable, sustainable, and culturally appropriate healthcare is critical to the health of Rhode Island as a whole. More than that, it's a fundamental right.

## Focus areas

- Improving access, use, and/or coordination of primary care and behavioral health care services, with particular focus on ensuring a robust and representative workforce across diverse care settings.
- Supporting efforts to mitigate key health disparities that focus on addressing underlying root causes, shifting institutional practices, and/or advancing systemic reform.
- Sustaining and expanding comprehensive community-based efforts that help individuals and families meet their basic needs and address inequities in the determinants of health for underserved communities.
- Innovative, collaborative initiatives beyond the stated focus areas with the potential to drive greater impact on healthy and strong communities - particularly those that address inequities and/or advance solutions across multiple community priorities.

# Case Studies

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## Clinica Esperanza/Hope Clinic

Established in 2007, Clinica Esperanza/Hope Clinic is dedicated to breaking down barriers to accessible healthcare with a mission to provide culturally attuned and linguistically appropriate medical care and preventive health services to uninsured Rhode Islanders. The clinic offers a Continuity of Care Clinic, specialty clinics, wraparound services, and the Emergency Room Diversion Project—known as the CHEER walk-in clinic.

The CHEER clinic serves a critical need, helping individuals with acute conditions like infections or chronic illnesses that, left untreated, could result in severe illness or death. Without CHEER, these patients would overcrowd emergency rooms or delay care until it's too late. In 2024, the clinic experienced a 50% surge in new patients, where the clinic was forced to turn away some seeking care due to capacity constraints.

The Rhode Island Foundation's support is helping expand capacity to meet this growing demand while delivering extraordinary value: for every dollar invested, \$71.18 is saved in preventable emergency room visits and hospitalizations. This funding enables the clinic to serve more uninsured Rhode Islanders while reducing strain on the state's healthcare system and preventing medical crises before they occur.

## Village Common Rhode Island

The Village Common of Rhode Island is a nonprofit, volunteer-driven membership organization that supports older adults who wish to age at home. Through a network of local villages—community-based networks of mutual support—The Village Common is seeking to fundamentally change the experience of growing older in Rhode Island. The organization helps communities establish and sustain villages across the state.

Currently operating in Barrington, Burrillville, Edgewood, Glocester, Providence, and Westerly, the organization connects volunteers with village members for transportation to medical appointments, household chores and minor repairs, technology support, and friendly calls and visits. Villages also host social and educational events, combating the isolation that profoundly affects older adults.

Recent statistics show that 18% of Rhode Island's population is now 65 and over, projected to reach 25% by 2040. With private homecare costs exceeding \$30 per hour, many older Rhode Islanders—particularly the 52% of older households earning under \$50,000—cannot afford needed support. The barriers are especially significant for older adults living alone who may be socially isolated or lacking family support, as well as LGBTQ+ older adults, women, and Hispanic and Black seniors who face higher care needs.

With Rhode Island Foundation support, The Village Common is developing new villages in Aquidneck Island, Cumberland, Exeter, and Jamestown, a village for older Hispanic adults on Providence's Southside, and a statewide Circle of Pride to better support LGBTQ+ older adults.