Rhode Island Foundation

Healthy and Strong Communities

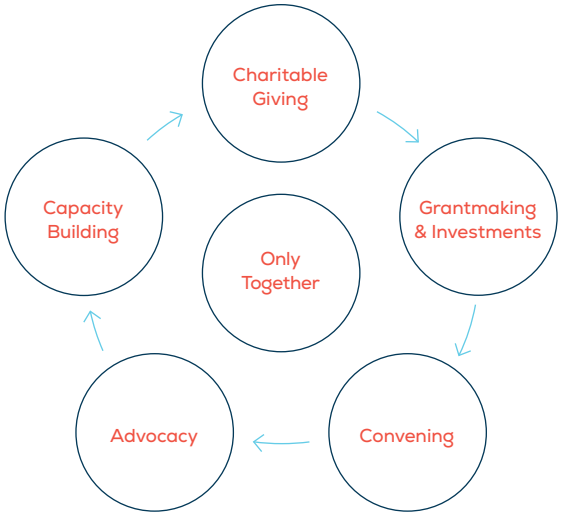
Learning and Impact Brief November 2026

Who We Are & What We Do

Together, we care for our neighbors.

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

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



Healthy and Strong Communities Grantmaking at a Glance

2025 Healthy and Strong Communities core and complementary grantmaking dollars awarded

$7.2 M

Total Number of Grantees Supported

160

Our Investment & 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 impact on healthy and strong communities – particularly those that address inequities and/or advance solutions across multiple community priorities.

Organizations We Support

Alliance for Community Health Worker Employers
Care Transformation Collaborative of Rhode Island
Children and Youth Cabinet
Clinica Esperanza/Hope Clinic
Family Service of Rhode Island, Inc.
Hartford Foundation for Public Giving
Latino Policy Institute
Primary Care for All Americans
Project Weber/RENEW
Rhode Island Free Clinic
Rhode Island Health Center Association
Rhode Island Hospital
Rhode Island Public Health Institute
Rhode Island Wellness Foundation
Rhode Island Association for Infant Mental Health
The Healthcare Workforce Education Center
Thundermist Health Center
Wellbeing Collaborative
William James College

Call off Your Old Tired Ethics Rhode Island
Center for Excellence in Health Care Journalists
Center for Health and Justice Transformation
Rhode Island Department of Health
The Economic Progress Institute
Urban Perinatal Education Center
West Elmwood Housing Development Corp.
Women's Resource Center

134 Collaborative
Adoption Rhode Island
Amenity Aid
Blackstone Valley Community Action Program, Inc.
Cartwheel RI
Clothes to Kids RI
Community Care Alliance
Comprehensive Community Action, Inc.
Connecting for Children and Families, Inc.
East Bay Community Action Program
Federal Hill House
Higher Ground International
Housing Hotline
Jewish Collaborative Services
John Hope Settlement House
Mae Organization, Inc.
Meals on Wheels of RI, Inc.
Project Undercover, Inc.
RAMP Real Access Motivates Progress
Refugee Development Center
Rhode Island Elder Info
Sojourner House
Southern Rhode Island Volunteers
Sunrise Forever, Inc.
The Elisha Project
Turning Around Ministries, Inc.
Washington County Coalition for Children
West End Community Center
Women's Refugee Care
YMCA of Pawtucket
Youth Pride, Inc.

Alliance to Mobilize Our Resistance
Child and Family Services of Newport County
Community Provider Network of Rhode Island
Direct Action for Rights & Equality
DaVinci Center for Community Progress
Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island
Elizabeth Buffum Chace Center
Families Reaching Into Each New Day, Inc.
Gotta Have Sole Foundation
Immigrant Coalition of Rhode Island
Justice Assistance
Newport County YANA Club
Newport Partnership for Families
Providence Youth Student Movement
Resource Organizing Project
Rhode Island Coalition for Children & Families Education Fund Inc.
Rhode Island Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty
Strategic Prevention Partnerships
The Partnership for Community Progress
The Village Common of RI
The Village for Rhode Island Foster and Adoptive Families
Thrive Behavioral Health, Inc.
Tower Street Center

Donor Spotlight: Shared Purpose



Walter A. Brown and Christine E. Ryan have spent their careers in health care and medical research. Walter, a semi-retired psychiatrist and professor emeritus at the Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University, teaches and writes. Christine, retired Brown research faculty, worked at Butler and Rhode Island Hospitals. The Tiverton couple talked for a few years about how to put some unexpected assets to good use before establishing the WAB Family Fund, a donor advised fund at the Rhode Island Foundation.

Long active in Tiverton through the Land Trust, Town Council, and Library, Christine first encouraged Walter to explore giving through the Foundation. “It’s always hard to figure out who and what to give to,” she shares. “The Rhode Island Foundation can work faster than the normal bureaucracy. They keep the bigger picture in focus.”

Meaningful goals and evidence-based outcomes matter to them. The Foundation’s Grantmaking and Community Investments team helps donors find vetted granting opportunities where their interests and the Foundation’s community priorities meet. For Walter and Christine, that was a Brown University Health street medicine initiative that brings physicians directly to people living unsheltered. By aligning their giving with the Foundation’s investment, the couple helped the effort go further.

“The program is a good match with our interests,” says Walter, who speaks to the conviction behind their giving. “This is a great country, but given all the resources, I find it very troublesome that people can’t afford health care, don’t have enough money to feed their families, and cannot find a decent place to live.”

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.

Timely, reliable care, from routine checkups to mental health support for a child, is the foundation of a healthy community. Yet Rhode Island's primary care providers are stretched thin, and many individuals and families struggle to get the care they need. Across the state, our grantees are working to close that gap. They're delivering care directly to thousands of Rhode Islanders, training a health care workforce that reflects the communities it serves, and strengthening mental health support for children and the adults who care for them.

225

Healthcare workers trained or credentialed, most (77%) reflecting the diversity of the communities they serve

77,340

Individuals who received direct care

1,700

Patients per primary care provider in Rhode Island, compared with a sustainable 1,200 patient caseload[1]

50%

Children, aged 3-17, who needed mental health treatment or counseling and had difficulty obtaining care[2]

1 Primary Care Spending and Utilization in RI, Office of The Health Insurance Commissioner, 2026
2 RI Kids Count Factbook 2026 "Children's Mental Health" p 56

*Projected impacts during the grant period. Metrics underrepresent impact due to variations in the data that grantees track and report.

What We're Learning

Access to care depends on a strong, representative workforce.

Rhode Island averages about 1,700 patients per primary care provider, well above the 1,200 considered sustainable. When caseloads are that high, appointments are harder to get and care is delayed. Adding providers isn't enough on its own. Research suggests people are more likely to seek care, and keep coming back, when their providers understand their language, culture, and experiences. That's why workforce efforts focused on representation matter. Of the 225 health care workers trained or credentialed through our support, 77% reflect the diversity of the communities they serve.

Families struggle to find mental health care for their children.

For half of Rhode Island children ages 3 to 17 who needed mental health treatment or counseling, getting that care was difficult. And challenges begin sooner than many people realize: among children under five with public health coverage, the share diagnosed with a serious emotional disturbance more than doubled, from 10% in 2017 to 22% today. Because mental health in the earliest years is shaped by close relationships, support for parents and caregivers is as important as care for the child.

Trust is part of care.

For people who have been stigmatized, mistreated, or turned away, the health care system can feel closed to them. Street medicine teams find that meeting people where they are, both in terms of the places they live and the realities of their lives, builds the trust that brings people back to vital health care. Those lessons are also informing how providers treat patients once they reach the hospital.

Health begins with meeting basic needs.

One in three Rhode Islanders report facing difficult tradeoffs between paying for food, medicine, and energy bills. When families have to choose between groceries and prescriptions, their health is affected long before they reach a doctor's office. Providers see the consequences every day: something as routine as bed rest is nearly impossible without a bed. In response, 78% of grantees are addressing multiple basic needs, recognizing that one unmet need can undermine progress of the others.

100%

Grantees supporting equity and inclusion

69%

Core grantees addressing systems change, root cause, or policy objectives

37%

Rhode Islanders who reported facing difficult tradeoffs between paying for basic needs like food, medicine, and energy bills[3]

81%

Core + complementary program grantees helping to address multiple basic needs

3 U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, Cycle 09, Aug 20- Sept 16, 2024

*Projected impacts during the grant period. Metrics underrepresent impact due to variations in the data that grantees track and report.

Grantee Impact Summaries

Brown University Health Street Medicine Program



Dr. Rebecca Karb, an emergency medicine physician known on the streets as "Becky," doesn't wait for patients to come to her. With Megan Smith, PhD, a social worker and Rhode Island College professor with more than a decade of outreach experience, she brings medical care directly to people living unsheltered, in encampments, tents, cars, and public spaces like Providence's Kennedy Plaza.

Outreach organizations such as House of Hope and Project Weber/RENEW have long provided consistent and effective street outreach, but there has been a gap in the engagement of medical institutions and health care providers with this important work.

Launched in 2023 with support from the Rhode Island Foundation, the Street Medicine program helps bring medical care to people who face great barriers to accessing it. More than 20 volunteer physicians and medical staff, from specialties including emergency medicine, infectious disease, and addiction medicine, offer unhurried, dignified treatment, ranging from basic wound care to managing complex conditions like HIV, Hepatitis C, and substance use. The team estimates this care has helped avoid approximately 330 emergency department visits or hospital admissions.

Just as important, Street Medicine works to rebuild trust with a health care system many patients have found unwelcoming. "I try to create an experience for them that feels respectful and empowering and might change the way they engage with health care moving forward," says Dr. Karb.

One patient who had refused hospital care for months eventually chose to return for follow-up surgery, but trust takes time to build. Lessons from treating people where they are also carry over to hospital care. "When you can meet patients on their terms, you have a better idea of their dimensionality," she explains. "These are little changes that add up over time."

Dr. Karb is also clear that health and housing are deeply interrelated. "When I'm out there, I focus on what I can control," she says, "but I am thinking, 'what this person really needs is a home.'"

Rhode Island Association for Infant Mental Health

The Rhode Island Association for Infant Mental Health (RIAIMH) works with the professionals who care for Rhode Island's youngest children, from nurses and pediatricians to early educators, home visitors, and mental health clinicians. Its work reflects what research has long shown: the foundations of mental health are built in the earliest years, through the relationships babies and young children have with the adults around them.

Recognizing and addressing mental health challenges in children so young takes specialized skills. To build them, RIAIMH worked with two national partners on a series of trainings for providers who work with children under six. Sessions on early development and relationship-based care drew an average of more than 80 participants each. Forty-seven clinicians and other professionals then attended an in-depth training on how to recognize and assess mental health conditions in babies and young children, using approaches designed specifically for their age group. Across the trainings, participants reported that they came away better prepared to identify and respond to mental health concerns in the children they serve. RIAIMH also partnered with Rhode Island KIDS COUNT to raise public awareness of mental health in early childhood.

Building on these trainings, a follow-up grant from the Rhode Island Foundation will help up to 20 of the newly trained clinicians put what they learned into everyday practice, through ongoing group learning and guidance, along with a path toward specialized credentialing.

Together, these efforts aim to make early childhood mental health care a standard part of how Rhode Island serves its youngest children and their families.



Learn More and Make a Difference

When we invest in the care, services, and essentials that sustain us, we build healthier, stronger communities for every Rhode Islander.

To learn more about the Rhode Island Foundation's work in this priority area, please contact:

Inés Merchán
Director, Strong Communities and Donor Aligned Funding
imerchan@rifoundation.org
401-427-4034

To support organizations and initiatives working to reduce health disparities by addressing barriers to quality health care services and basic needs across Rhode Island, you may direct your gift to the **Fund for Rhode Island** or the **Fund for Healthy and Strong Communities** at **rifoundation.org**.

Our Approach

Learning is most meaningful when it happens alongside our partners. As part of our Learning & Impact framework, we examine our support at two levels: the results of individual grants, and the bigger picture across our full portfolio. To do that, we draw on multiple sources: grantee experiences and outcomes, site visits, conversations, and community-level data. We recognize that positive change happens through the efforts of many, and these briefs are our way of capturing that collaborative impact.

Only together can we learn, respond, and build a better Rhode Island.

Rhode Island Foundation

Meeting Basic Needs Across Rhode Island



Across the state, many households are struggling year-round to keep up with the rising cost of food, housing, and health care. One in three Rhode Islanders report having to choose between paying for food, medicine, and energy bills.

For many, the nonprofits that receive Rhode Island Foundation grant support are a lifeline, stepping in when there isn't enough food to last the week, when prescriptions become unaffordable, or when the heat is at risk of being shut off. The help these organizations offer is practical and direct: it can keep a roof overhead, send a child to school ready to learn, or help a senior afford both groceries and medication.

In Rhode Island's cities and towns, pantries, community kitchens, and congregations provide food staples, ready-to-eat dishes, hygiene products, and household supplies to residents who need help making ends meet. Meals on Wheels of Rhode Island delivers nutritious meals and daily wellness checks to thousands of older adults and people with disabilities.

Grantee partners also address needs beyond food. Crossroads Rhode Island, the state's leading provider of housing and services for people experiencing homelessness, offers emergency shelter, street outreach and more than 410 units of permanent supportive housing statewide. Gotta Have Sole Foundation provides new, properly fitting shoes to children without a stable home, promoting their health, confidence, and ability to take part fully in school and everyday life.

For some organizations, meeting basic needs is part of a broader mission. Operation Stand Down Rhode Island works with veterans, Dorcas International Institute helps immigrant and refugee families, and Progreso Latino connects Latino families with resources and opportunities. Sojourner House assists survivors of domestic violence, and Youth Pride provides LGBTQ+ young people with basic needs support, counseling, and a safe place to connect.

These examples represent only a share of the 94 organizations the Foundation supported in 2025, all doing vital work for Rhode Islanders.

Together with our grantee partners, we care for our neighbors.

Learn More and Make a Difference

To help Rhode Islanders meet their most basic needs, you may direct your gift to the **Fund for Healthy and Strong Communities** at **rifoundation.org**. To learn more, please contact **Inés Merchán, Director, Strong Communities and Donor Aligned Funding**, at imerchan@rifoundation.org or by phone at (401) 427-4034.

Alongside our core grantmaking, the Rhode Island Foundation's Healthy and Strong Communities priority includes grant programs that complement this work by helping community agencies respond to urgent needs across the state. These grants go to nonprofit organizations that deliver direct assistance to Rhode Islanders most in need, covering essentials such as food, clothing, and personal care items; childcare for families experiencing homelessness; housing and rent; prescriptions; and transportation to work and appointments.

In 2025, the Foundation awarded more than $1.5 million to 94 organizations statewide through these programs.

American Red Cross

Amos House

Aquidneck Food Pantry

Artists' Exchange

Barrington Tap-In

Basic Needs Network

Benjamin Church Senior Center

Berean Baptist Church

Better Lives Rhode Island

Blackstone Valley Prevention Coalition

Capeverdean American Community Development

Capital City Community Centers, Inc.

Central Falls Children's Foundation

Central Falls Family Self Sufficiency Foundation

Children's Friend and Service

Church of St. Mary of the Bay

City Meal Site, Inc.

Clothes to Kids RI

Community Angels

Community Baptist Church

Connecting for Children and Families, Inc.

CPG Foundation

Crossroads RI

DaVinci Center for Community Progress

Dirt Palace Public Projects

Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island

Dr. Martin Luther King Community Center

East Bay Food Pantry

East Greenwich Interfaith Food Cupboard

Farm Fresh Rhode Island

Federal Hill House

First Unitarian Church of Providence

Food Not Bombs

Foster Forward

Good Neighbors Inc.

Gotta Have Sole Foundation

Greater Love Outreach Ministries

Help the Homeless RI

Housing Hotline

Iglesia Cristiana Rios De Agua Viva

Joe Andruzzi Foundation

Jonnycake Center of Westerly

Jonnycake Center for Hope

Learning Community Charter School, Inc.

Lighthouse Community Development Corporation

Limitless Living

Llamados A Servir

Loaves & Fishes Rhode Island

Mae Organization, Inc

Mathewson Street United Methodist Church

McAuley Ministries

Meals on Wheels of RI, Inc.

Narragansett Affordable Housing, Inc.

New Englanders Helping Our Veterans

North Kingstown Food Pantry

Northern RI Food Pantry Inc.

One Less Worry

OpenDoors

Operation Stand Down Rhode Island

Praise Tabernacle

Pretty Cares Inc.

Problem Pregnancy of Providence

Progreso Latino

Project Outreach

Project Weber/RENEW

Providence Public Library

Providence Student Union

ReFocus

Rhode Island Center for Justice

Rhode Island Community Food Bank

Rhode Island Minority Elder Task Force, Inc.

Salvation Army - Pawtucket Corps

Scalabrini Lay Movement

Seamen's Church Institute of Newport

Service Members Assistance Fund

Seven Hills Rhode Island

Sojourner House

Spirit of Hope

St. Mary's Episcopal Church

St. Patrick's Food Pantry

St. Peters-by-the-Sea

Strategic Prevention Partnerships

The Milagros Project

Tides Family Services Inc.

Trinity Episcopal Church

Trinity Tabernacle, Inc.

We're Just People

West Warwick Senior Citizens Center, Inc.

Westerly Area Rest Meals

Westminster Unitarian Church

Woodbury Union Presbyterian Church

YMCA of Pawtucket

Your Neighborhood Food Pantry

Youth Pride, Inc.