

Kaiser Permanente Northwest Community Health Priorities and Strategies



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At [Kaiser Permanente Northwest](#), we are leading the nation in innovative approaches to transforming health care. To achieve more equitable health outcomes and make a meaningful, sustainable impact in the communities we serve, we collaborate with residents, businesses, community-based organizations, social service providers, and other health systems to co-create solutions that respond to community needs.

KAISER PERMANENTE NORTHWEST COMMUNITY HEALTH

Being healthy is more than just access to medical care. The total health of a person is impacted by physical, mental, social, and community factors. Kaiser Permanente is broadening and accelerating our efforts to address the root causes of health such as access to care, economic opportunity, equity, housing, nutrition, mental health and wellness, pandemic response, safe and supportive schools, and social health.

Our Community Health priorities and strategies, which also support our [Community Health Needs Assessments](#) (CHNA), inform where Kaiser Permanente Northwest resources will make the greatest impact. Many of our initiatives are multifaceted supporting more than one priority.

Current Kaiser Permanent Northwest priorities are:

- [Economic opportunity](#)
- [Equity](#)
- [Mental Health and Wellness](#)
- [Pandemic Response](#)
- [Safety Net Partnerships](#)
- [Social Health](#)
 - [Housing](#)
 - [Nutrition](#)
- [Thriving Schools](#)

Ctrl+Click on any of the menu items above for details.

[TOP](#)

Economic Opportunity

Health and well-being are intrinsically linked to the economic stability and financial growth of individuals and communities. Poorer health conditions and higher mortality rates disproportionately affect Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian and other communities of color, which has become amplified as a result of the health and economic crisis from the pandemic.

At Kaiser Permanente Northwest, we are utilizing strategies to increase income, improve financial security, and reduce economic inequities through our business operations and community partnerships. We strive to transform individuals, communities, and the way we do business to intentionally and effectively support inclusive, local economic opportunity as a core underlying driver of health.

We are working to do this through:

- Addressing racial equity and systemic and structural disadvantages, including practices, policies, and biases
- Business growth and operations that prioritize supplier diversity, impact hiring, inclusive investments, sustainable construction/facility partnerships, and purchasing goods and services from local businesses owned by Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, and other people of color
- Workforce development and employment, college and career readiness, and helping people connect to quality jobs in health care and other growth industries
- Increasing individual financial strength and asset building by supporting access to financial literacy and savings programs, overcoming debt, and building wealth
- Fostering community partnerships that support local and diverse, small and medium businesses to thrive and grow, including capacity building, technical assistance, training, and job creation
 - Partners in this work include [Inner City Capital Connections](#) (ICCC), [Local Initiatives Support Corporation](#) (LISC), and [other national partners](#)

[TOP](#)

Equity

For 75 years, Kaiser Permanente's unwavering mission and foundational values have embraced diversity and equality for all. Ongoing racist events have called for the reinforcement of Kaiser Permanente's commitment to equity that fosters equitable economic opportunity, health equity, safe places to work, and advances efforts to end structural racism and break cycles of trauma.

Within Kaiser Permanente Northwest, we are evolving foundational systems to achieve workforce equity, [eliminate health disparities](#) for our members, and leverage our voice, resources, and influence to create equity and inclusion for all marginalized groups. Throughout the region, we aim to create a healthy, resilient society with policies and practices that are anti-racist and equipped to foster racial equity, healing, and good health for communities and individuals of color.

To support these efforts our approach includes:

- Improving [health equity](#) in care experience and health outcomes by eliminating racism and other forms of bias or oppression in health care
- Fostering equitable economic opportunity for Black-owned businesses and other businesses owned by marginalized groups
- [Ending systemic racism](#) by dismantling discriminatory institutional practices, structures, and public policies that create barriers for communities of color
- Investing in [local community-based organization](#) to strengthen leadership and actions supporting advocacy for progressive change
- [Workplace equity policies](#) that create an inclusive, psychologically safe workplace, where everyone has an equal opportunity to reach their full potential
- Breaking the cycle of racism and intergenerational trauma, and promote healing by increasing knowledge of the health impacts of racism to create systems of care and support that treat and prevent racial trauma, stress, grief, and [Adverse Childhood Experiences](#) (ACEs)
 - Partners in this work include [Portland African American Leadership Forum/Imagine Black](#), [Urban League of Portland](#), and other national partners

[TOP](#)

Mental Health and Wellness

Kaiser Permanente Northwest recognizes the social and emotional challenges that individuals and communities experience. We are working to improve the mental health, wellness, and resilience of communities through culturally-specific, trauma-sensitive systems of care and prevention efforts; addiction treatment programs; and the integration of physical and mental health care in clinical and community settings.

Access to mental health and social supports

When we're facing mental health challenges, the availability of high-quality, culturally sensitive support is critical, not only to help us through the immediateness of a crisis we may be facing, but also over the long term.

Kaiser Permanente Northwest is making it easier to access mental health and supportive services by working with community partners to integrate those services into primary care settings in schools and community clinics. We partner with [schools](#) and clinics to providing training that is trauma-informed – sensitive to ways that trauma over our lifetime can impact our overall health and well-being.

We also recognize that there are many social factors that can impact a person's mental health – from our ability to maintain a job, to finding affordable housing, to putting nutritious food on the table. We work with numerous community-based organizations to access safe, affordable housing, employment resources, transportation, and other social needs that support positive mental health and wellness so that individuals and families can get the stability they need to be at their best and thrive.

Addiction and recovery

Substance abuse from alcohol and drug addiction is a widespread epidemic in our region and requires a coordinated approach to treatment. Kaiser Permanente Northwest is actively working with community partners to advocate for policies that strengthen addiction treatment and support. We participate in several statewide and regional efforts focused on substance abuse and opioid use reduction.

We are helping build capacity and bring resources to peer support organizations such as the [Mental Health and Addiction Association of Oregon](#) to help patients struggling with mental health and addiction challenges enhance their recovery and long-term mental health.

Resilience

Resilience is the ability to bounce back or recover from trauma and associated mental health challenges we experience. We believe that we can foster greater resiliency by addressing mental health issues early and fostering strategies that focus on preventing crisis in the first place. Kaiser Permanente works in [schools](#) and primary care settings to screen for signs of trauma early and provide culturally appropriate interventions that meet people where they are.

Disparities

As with any form of care, we respond better when we are cared for in our own language and cultural context of understanding. That's why Kaiser Permanente believes in building a diverse, skilled [mental health workforce](#) that can provide support to diverse communities. We regularly convene a cultural competency committee on mental health to ensure we provide support to people in a way that recognizes their unique life experiences and needs.

[TOP](#)

Pandemic Response

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly altered how we live, learn, work, travel, and play. It also magnified the significant health, economic, and social disparities in the U.S.

Kaiser Permanente is on the frontlines of the pandemic response to protect the health and safety of our employees, members, and communities. We quickly pivoted our operations and how we provide care to help stem the spread of COVID-19, bolster public health infrastructure, and support an effective, equitable pandemic response in partnership with other health systems, [Oregon Health Authority](#), and community-based organizations.

Our response includes, but is not limited to:

- Awarding \$700,000 in [grants to seven to community-based organizations](#) from Eugene, OR to Longview, WA to support homeless services with COVID-19 prevention and response
- Launching COVID-19 [studies](#) at the Kaiser Permanente Northwest Center for Health Research as well as participating in [vaccine clinical trials](#)
- Contributing \$1 million to the [National Health Care for the Homeless Council](#) to support community-based organizations helping address the critical threat COVID-19 poses to the homeless, and elevate the ability to care for the most underserved populations; [Central City Concern](#) in Portland was a recipient of this support
- Contributing \$1 million to the [Center for Disease Control](#) to support leading public health organizations across the country to help strengthen public health infrastructure and increase capacity to respond to the pandemic
- Partnering with other health systems and community-based organizations to address the social health of individuals and families

In addition, we delivered meals to COVID-19 patients being discharged from the hospital, offered household prevention kits to keep members safe while quarantining at home, supported the implementation of contact tracing efforts, provided motel vouchers for those experiencing homelessness to shelter-in-place, and are now serving as stewards of the [vaccine](#) in order to administer vaccinations to every person in our region – both our members and non-members.

[TOP](#)

Safety Net Partnerships

Access to health care is essential for maintaining good health. Kaiser Permanente is committed to building partnership with community organizations that play a critical role in delivering health care for the uninsured and underserved, often referred to as the health care “safety net.” Safety net partnerships are essential to increasing access to care for all.

Partnering with safety net providers strengthens our collective work to improve care for patients who face barriers in accessing quality health care and also enables us to develop shared strategies that improve patient care. Safety net partnerships are an integrated approach to supporting whole person care that addresses physical, behavioral, and social needs.

Together with community health centers, public health departments, and community-based organizations, we develop innovative ways to engage hard-to-reach populations, provide care to non-English speaking patients, proactively connect patients to social and financial support systems, and identify and foster leaders in health care for ongoing improvement in communities throughout the region.

Safety net partnership areas of focus include:

- Social health
- Specialty care access
- Virtual care

Current initiatives include:

Health Systems Access to Care Fund

Community-supported clinics throughout the region provide vital services by delivering care to members of the local community who, because of a lack of resources, may not otherwise be able to access care. These clinics provide a variety of primary care services, often through physician and nurse volunteers. While each clinic is unique, they all have one thing in common – they exist because of the support they get from the local community.

We partner with community clinics to increase their capacity to serve more people and strengthen their sustainability so that they can continue their work for the long term. This includes developing innovative ways to improve data collection, increase financial sustainability, and provide more culturally responsive care.

Kaiser Permanente Northwest is proud to partner with Providence Health & Services, Legacy Health, and PeaceHealth on the [Health Systems Access to Care Fund](#). Collectively these four health systems fund community supported clinics and provide technical assistance to clinics in our shared service areas. The Health Systems Access to Care Fund is located at Oregon Community Foundation.

Virtual Care Innovation Network

COVID-19 dramatically accelerated the adoption and use of virtual care by health care organizations across the country. This transformational shift included adopting new technologies, overhauled workflows, staff training, and other advancements. In order to sustain and expand upon this work, Kaiser Permanente partnered with Center for Care Innovations to launch the [Virtual Care Innovation Network](#), which aims to bring together safety net organizations in all Kaiser Permanente regions to redesign care so that virtual care models continue beyond the pandemic. The network will enable participants to learn from peers and experts, test new approaches, accelerate the work they have already started, and further the development of virtual care as an essential component of care delivery.

[TOP](#)

Social Health

Kaiser Permanente believes that total health is more than what happens in the doctor’s office – it’s physical health of the body, mental health of the mind, *and* social health of having your basic needs met such as nutritious food, safe housing, employment, transportation, positive relationships, and more. We are committed to elevating the social health of our members and communities to the same level as physical and mental health in order to serve as a model for a national approach to whole-person care. And with the toll that the pandemic is taking on everyone, our work to address social health is more important than ever.

Addressing people’s social health will elevate the quality of care people receive, improve the health of our members and communities, reduce the total cost of health care, and can help inform advocacy for policy solutions to improve health equity over time.

Connect Oregon

Kaiser Permanente Northwest is addressing social health by leveraging the collective power of community-based organizations, public agencies, and other health systems through [Connect Oregon + SW WA](#), an online network that enables health care and social service providers to coordinate with each other to better serve communities in Oregon and Southwest Washington. Our vision is a [community information exchange](#) that connects health care and community organizations to provide support and services to people throughout the Northwest.

[Watch: What is Connect Oregon?](#)

[TOP](#)

Housing

Housing and health are inextricably connected. Without a safe place to live, it's nearly impossible to focus on health and health care needs. When individuals and families experience housing instability or homelessness, they are put under mental and physical stress as they are forced to make hard choices to survive and obtain basic life necessities. And the pandemic has put the health of people experiencing homelessness at even greater risk.

With an emphasis on decreasing disparities and increasing equity, Kaiser Permanente Northwest is leading the way through regional investments and supporting innovations that seek to prevent homelessness and address the affordable housing crisis in the region so that all people can have access to a safe and stable home. Our approach includes efforts to:

- Prevent and end chronic homelessness through evidence-based diversion and housing stabilization strategies to keep people in their homes, or quickly rebound from homelessness, such as capacity building for community-based organizations, legal aid, and wrap-around mental and physical health and tenant supportive services
 - Kaiser Permanente's \$5.1 million investment in [Metro 300](#) is an initiative that is housing 300 homeless, medically vulnerable seniors.
- Increase and enhance affordable, long-term housing to reach population level goals
 - Kaiser Permanente Northwest invested millions of dollars to help create hundreds of units of affordable housing at [Redwood Crossings](#) in Salem, [The Commons on MLK](#) in Eugene, Central City Concern's [Blackburn Center](#) in East Portland, among others.
- Shape local and federal policy by collaborating with city, state, and national leaders
 - Recently passed [Metro Supportive Housing Services ballot measure 26-210](#) was [endorsed by Kaiser Permanent Northwest](#) and will raise up to \$2.5 billion over ten years to support people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness in Multnomah, Washington, and Clackamas Counties. The measure prioritizes racial equity and will fund rent assistance, behavioral health services, job training, and other initiatives.
- Transform health care and housing through a whole person approach with strategies that strengthen the connection to health care, social services, and safety net providers for people experiencing homelessness or formerly homeless, accelerating innovative and culturally competent virtual models of care
 - To support homeless services with [COVID-19 prevention and response](#), Kaiser Permanente Northwest recently awarded \$700,000 in grant funding to seven community-based organizations across our region.
 - Our [Housing for Health](#) initiative recently concluded a three-and-a-half-year effort that awarded seven community-based organization funding (total investment of \$2.2 million) to deploy Traditional Health Workers (THW) who supported people with mental health and addiction challenges, a population for whom securing and maintain safe, stable housing can be an even greater challenge.

[TOP](#)

Nutrition

Proper nutrition has always been an essential component of good health but, prior to the pandemic, one in nine U.S. households were facing hunger. During the pandemic, it is now estimated that one in six households lack consistent access to adequate, nutritious food. And hunger disproportionately affects underserved populations and is also linked to a variety of adverse health conditions including poor chronic disease management, developmental and mental health issues, increased hospitalizations, and higher costs of care. Proper nutrition can improve recovery time, reduce the number of re-hospitalizations, and decrease the number of co-morbid health complications.

Kaiser Permanente is working to ensure everyone has access to nutritious food through our [Food for Life](#) initiatives, which support organizations that distribute food to those in need; increase purchasing power of food through enrollment in SNAP, WIC, and coupon programs; and research, policy and advocacy efforts for regulations that support SNAP and WIC, nutrition, access to affordable food for underserved populations, as well as implementing and expanding school nutrition policies. This comprehensive approach aims to transform the economic, social, and policy environments connected to food so that people across the nation have access to, and can afford, healthy food.

Meal distribution

Launched in 2020, Kaiser Permanente Northwest's Medically Tailored Meals program is a partnership with [Meals On Wheels People](#) that delivers healthy meals to patients' homes who are chronically ill and discharged from the hospital; each meal nutritionally tailored by a dietitian to fit patient recovery needs. Studies show that people who receive medically tailored meals are 23% more likely to be discharged to their homes rather than another facility, and are 50% less likely to be readmitted to the hospital for recurrence or additional complications.

Increasing purchasing power

Programs that increase purchasing power of nutritious food help individuals and families stretch their grocery budget, feel better, save money, and increase access to more healthy options.

- Kaiser Permanente is helping to increase enrollment in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the government-sponsored program - available at no cost to participants - that can help individuals and families purchase food. Improving SNAP enrollment improves health outcomes, decreases the cost of care, and drives systems-level impact for our members and the communities we serve. SNAP also boosts economic well-being for participants by providing dollars to spend on food, as well as making a positive economic impact on the local and national economy as SNAP benefits are spent in local grocery stores and markets.
 - Learn more about SNAP in [Oregon](#).
 - For more information about SNAP in [Washington](#).
- Manufacturer coupons can also help stretch grocery budgets and increase purchasing power. To that end, Kaiser Permanente launched the Healthy Savings® coupons program distributed to those with an annual household income below 400% of the [Federal Poverty Guidelines](#). The coupons offer discounts on a range of healthy foods including whole grain bread, cereal, eggs, lean meat, and produce, and are redeemable at more than 30,000 retail locations including Walmart, Kroger, Safeway, Vons, and others. The program is available at no cost to Kaiser Permanente members through February 28, 2022, regardless of insurance status.

Research, policy, advocacy

Each of the initiatives above has a research or evaluation component included to capture the successes and challenges of each program, and to inform the design of future programs and initiatives. Our findings build the evidence of what works and in what conditions, tests implementations that deliver healthy affordable food, and documents the effects of nutritional food in medicine. Research can also inform policy and advocacy for regulations that support SNAP, nutrition, and healthy, affordable food for people who are ill and underserved populations, as well as implementing and expanding school nutrition policies.

[TOP](#)

Thriving Schools

Schools are an important focal point for enacting policies and practices that lead to better health. Good health boosts educational success and educational success leads to better lifelong health, employment, earning potential, and self-confidence. Kaiser Permanente [Thriving Schools](#) is our all-in engagement to foster healthier school environments across the nation for students, staff, and teachers.

In the Northwest, we have a partnership with Washington State University to bring [Collaborative Learning for Educational Achievement and Resilience](#) (CLEAR) to the Canby, OR and Battleground and Vancouver, WA school districts. CLEAR supports integration of trauma informed practices into school environments through staff development, consultation, and support.

[TOP](#)