

From *Community Health and Economic Prosperity: Engaging Businesses as Stewards and Stakeholders—A Report of the Surgeon General*

What Can Businesses Do to Help Address the U.S. Health Disadvantage?

The Surgeon General's report (*Community Health and Economic Prosperity: Engaging Businesses as Stewards and Stakeholders—A Report of the Surgeon General*) offers recommendations on what businesses can do, in collaboration with others, to begin the work of strengthening communities and addressing the U.S. health disadvantage.

1

First, businesses can learn more about their stakeholders and take actions to better understand and meet the needs of those stakeholders, so they can all thrive together.

For example, Hillenbrand Inc., established dialogue with business and community leaders of Batesville, Indiana, a rural town in which the company is headquartered. This group has become a “think tank,” studying and solving large issues facing the community, including diversity and inclusion, workforce skills, and the development of a vibrant downtown.¹

2

Second, businesses can foster a culture of stewardship. Stewardship refers to managing one's impact on society in a positive way. Businesses can become better stewards through their policies, investments, advocacy, and hiring and procurement practices—all the ways in which businesses conduct their operations.

For example, Greyston Bakery uses “open hiring” to employ individuals who may be passed over by other employers due to a lack of education or a history of incarceration or substance misuse. As Greyston and other employers have found, their employees often prove to be highly effective, productive, dedicated, and loyal. That's great for business and a win for community. People with jobs and incomes are good for communities and good for the economy.²

3

Third, businesses can join with strategic partners from across sectors. Collaboration is key to business success in improving community health and increasing economic prosperity.

For example, Morgan Stanley, an investment and financial services company, partnered with Local Initiatives Support Corporation, a national community development financial institution, and the Kresge Foundation to create the \$200-million Healthy Futures Fund. So Others Might Eat, a nonprofit community development corporation, used funds from the Healthy Futures Fund to develop the Conway Center, which provides homeless families with affordable housing, a health center, and job training—all adjacent to a transit station.³

4

Fourth, businesses can measure performance using meaningful indicators of community health and well-being. This process begins by identifying WHAT MATTERS MOST in community health, and includes collaborating with others to create interventions and using data to measure progress toward achieving success.

For example, to spur job creation in struggling communities after the Great Recession, Starbucks collaborated with the Opportunity Finance Network on an initiative called, “Create Jobs for the USA.” By carefully measuring and reporting loans made and jobs created or retained, Starbucks was able to assess the impact of its investment on communities.⁴

Strengthening health and prosperity is a shared responsibility. Health and the economy are inextricably linked. Both must thrive if either is to be strong. To move beyond the status quo requires stepping up to improve community health and expand economic opportunity for everyone—together.

Notes

¹ As described by Joe Raver, President and CEO, Hillenbrand, Inc., in *Community Health and Economic Prosperity: Engaging Businesses as Stewards and Stakeholders—A Report of the Surgeon General* (pp. 165–170).

² Information obtained by Gerry Yemen, University of Virginia Darden School of Business, during interviews conducted on November 25, 2019, specifically for *Community Health and Economic Prosperity: Engaging Businesses as Stewards and Stakeholders—A Report of the Surgeon General*.

³ Local Initiatives Support Corporation. (n.d.). Financial opportunity center. Retrieved from <https://www.lisc.org/our-initiatives/financial-stability/financial-opportunity-centers/>; and So Others Might Eat. (n.d.). About Affordable Housing Initiative. Retrieved from <https://www.some.org/about/affordable-housing-initiative>

⁴ Richardson, S. (2016, September 8). The Create Jobs for USA Program. Retrieved from <https://www.bostonfed.org/publications/communities-and-banking/2016/fall/the-create-jobs-for-usa-program.aspx>

ABOUT THIS FACT SHEET | The content of this fact sheet is adapted from *Community Health and Economic Prosperity: Engaging Businesses as Stewards and Stakeholders—A Report of the Surgeon General*.



The complete Surgeon General’s report describes the U.S. health disadvantage and the importance of strengthening communities and improving the health of residents. It also offers recommendations for how businesses can address the U.S. health disadvantage by engaging with and investing in communities, while creating value, lowering business costs, and improving the health of employees and other stakeholders.

For more content—including supporting references and additional resources—view the complete report, business digest, fact sheets, and other supplementary materials at <https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/reports-and-publications/>



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