The Central Providence Health Equity Zone

The Health Equity Zone (HEZ) Initiative

The Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) established Health Equity Zones (HEZs) in 2015 to improve community health in areas that need it most. HEZs are collaboratives of residents, community organizations, health professionals, and others who come together to address the root causes of health disparities. The HEZs work to ensure every neighborhood has a fair and just opportunity to be healthier. This work requires removing obstacles to health such as poverty, discrimination, racism, and their consequences, including insufficient access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education, affordable housing, safe environments, and healthcare.

Key Accomplishments

- 200 hours of mindfulness education
- 25 Community Based Organizations (CBOs) engaged
- 3903 residents received free, fresh produce
- 171 youth attended free sports camps
- 39 affordable homes replaced abandoned properties
- 5 community-designed fitness stations installed in Olneyville parks
- 2 Community Health Workers trained to address cardiovascular disease and diabetes

Expanding our reach: Central Providence HEZ

The Central Providence Health Equity Zone is an extension of the Olneyville Health Equity Zone. The Olneyville HEZ was built on a foundation of more than a thousand hours of resident interviews, dozens of community events, and countless organizational meetings. Using the knowledge gained from residents, ONE Neighborhood Builders (ONE|NB), residents and partners completed an action plan to remove obstacles to health. Then, ONE|NB and Collaborative partners went to work.

The Olneyville neighborhood saw many improvements to community health by 2018. Because of this success, the Olneyville HEZ decided to expand their target area to include nearby neighborhoods (Hartford, Valley and Federal Hill) with similar characteristics but fewer community organizations to do the work. With this expansion, they renamed themselves the “Central Providence” HEZ (CP-HEZ).

- 38% increase in residents who believed they could easily access healthy food.
- 12% increase in monthly use of Joslin Park.
- 5% decrease in residents diagnosed with a chronic disease.
A Focus on Economic Opportunity

WHY? Life expectancy in central Providence neighborhoods is about 9 years less than that of residents from more socioeconomically advantaged neighborhoods of Providence. 50% of the factors that determine health have to do with economic and social conditions.

HOW? To address socio-economic disparities we work to increase housing stability and affordability, improve access to living-wage employment and expand basic needs, such as childcare and transportation.

IMPACT? By improving the social and economic conditions of the community, the overall health of a community will improve. When our neighbors are healthier, they use less of expensive healthcare services. Savings realized by the healthcare system have the potential to be reinvested in actions that promote health.