


Pathways to Health Equity

Addressing Needs Today
& Building a Healthier Tomorrow

/ 2024-2030

An abstract graphic composed of various colored triangles and polygons in shades of yellow, orange, red, green, and blue, arranged in a dynamic, overlapping pattern on the right side of the page.

Our Journey

Since our inception in 1996, St. David's Foundation has invested more than \$900 million to improve health outcomes in Central Texas, provided dental care to over 100,000 patients, and supported over 700 students through the Neal Kocurek Scholarship Program. Our community investments have seen tremendous growth from \$225,000 in our first year to more than \$80 million in 2023. Historically, St. David's Foundation has focused largely on direct services addressing the immediate needs of our community. Populations are growing and health outcomes for marginalized Central Texans continue to suffer because of inequitable conditions. These ongoing health disparities cannot be addressed by only filling the healthcare gaps. Instead, we seek to also change systems and conditions to reduce those health disparities from the onset.

Given our growth as a Foundation over nearly three decades, we are now able to support immediate health needs **today** as well as invest in improved health **tomorrow** for generations to come. This evolution allowed us to broaden our focus on healthcare to the more expansive mission of advancing health equity. However, to effectively work toward health equity, we need to operate in both spheres so that direct services and systems work **together**. To move this work forward, in September 2022 the Board of Trustees of St. David's Foundation approved the following new **Strategic Vision and Direction**.



VISION FOR CENTRAL TEXAS

A vibrant and inclusive community in which every individual can flourish and reach their full potential.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Listen, learn, and evolve
- Use an equity lens in our work
- Embrace effective risk-taking
- Make data-driven decisions aligned with evidence, strategy, and community voice
- Measure outcomes and strive for high-impact work



MISSION FOR THE FOUNDATION

To advance health equity in Central Texas through investment and action.



CORE VALUES

- Collaboration
- Community
- Compassion
- Innovation
- Stewardship



STRATEGY

We focus on removing barriers to better living **today** and changing systems and conditions to improve outcomes for a healthier community **tomorrow**.

How We Define Health Equity

Achieving [health equity](#) means that all Central Texans have a fair and just opportunity to live as healthfully as possible – regardless of their demographic or where they live, work, worship, or play. We see health equity as both a process and an outcome. As a process, it is a way of working that centers people who historically have had less power and opportunity. As an outcome, it is when communities throughout Central Texas are absent of systemic disparities that cause poor health outcomes.

Furthermore, a person’s zip code should not determine how healthy they are. Yet, we know there are wide disparities in health status, disease prevalence, and mortality based on race, ethnicity, gender, and geography. Today in Central Texas, health disparities cost over [\\$450M in excess healthcare](#) spending and lost productivity. That number will more than double by 2050 increasing to an estimated cost of over \$1B annually if we do not act to address the systemic inequities driving these profound and costly differences.

But we can imagine something different. Our vision is a vibrant and inclusive Central Texas where every individual can reach their full potential.

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*With the adoption of the Foundation’s new strategic plan, we will explore new ways of working and creating impact to ensure that our investments and partnerships are community-focused and equity-driven. **It will represent a huge shift in culture and approach for the Foundation**, and I am so proud to be part of the organization at this pivotal time of change.*

SHANNON RATLIFF II

Chair, St. David’s Foundation
Board of Trustees

Context for a New Strategic Plan

The path that led to this Strategic Plan follows a nearly thirty-year history of serving the community, ongoing and in-depth community health needs assessments (CHNAs), [actively listening to our community](#), and an ever-evolving perspective on centering equity throughout our work. Our journey also taught us that we can realize greater impact when the Foundation’s work is aligned and unified.

Thus, the goals and strategies here are designed to harness the community impact teams across the Foundation along with the community affairs, finance, grants management, human resources, information technology, and legal teams, and foster collaboration internally as well as within communities.

COMMUNITY IMPACT TEAMS



GRANTMAKING

Investing nearly \$80M annually to support community health and well-being.



MOBILE DENTAL PROGRAM

Providing highly accessible, evidence-based oral care for children in Central Texas.



SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Easing the financial burden for students pursuing health studies and supporting student success.



LEARNING & EVALUATION

Using data and research to bring diverse stakeholders into a shared conversation to realize deeper insights.



COMMUNICATIONS

Sharing what we are learning to create a community-wide understanding of health equity.

This also means identifying areas of opportunity and investing in staffing capacity and expertise as well as building the requisite technological and operational infrastructure to support more effective and impactful cross-team collaboration.

The goals and strategies of this foundation-wide Strategic Plan were designed to help us live into our new Strategic Vision and Direction as well as advance the most recent Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) Implementation Plan (download [here](#) for reference), approved by the Board of Trustees in April 2023.

Through this strategic planning process, our staff and board determined **six aspirational ways** in which we wish to change our work as a foundation. We will examine the Foundation's culture, structure, and governance so that our work will:

1. Focus more of our investments and action in **communities with the greatest health needs in our geography**, acknowledging that some of these communities are also the populations and places which the Foundation knows the least;
2. Increase our focus on **upstream** efforts;
3. Be more **collaborative, connected, responsive**, and **region-wide**;
4. Involve deeper **community engagement**;
5. Use a **wide variety of tools** to create meaningful change;
6. Operate as a **unified foundation** with alignment on shared goals, processes that support greater connectivity, and culture change.

Pathways to Health Equity: Our Goals for Central Texas

Here we introduce our four goals to advance health equity and highlight our rationale for each. The three externally facing goals were informed by discussions with staff, Board, and community; external research; and the findings of the most recent [CHNA](#), through which we more deeply understand our region’s true health needs – particularly those faced by historically-underserved community members.

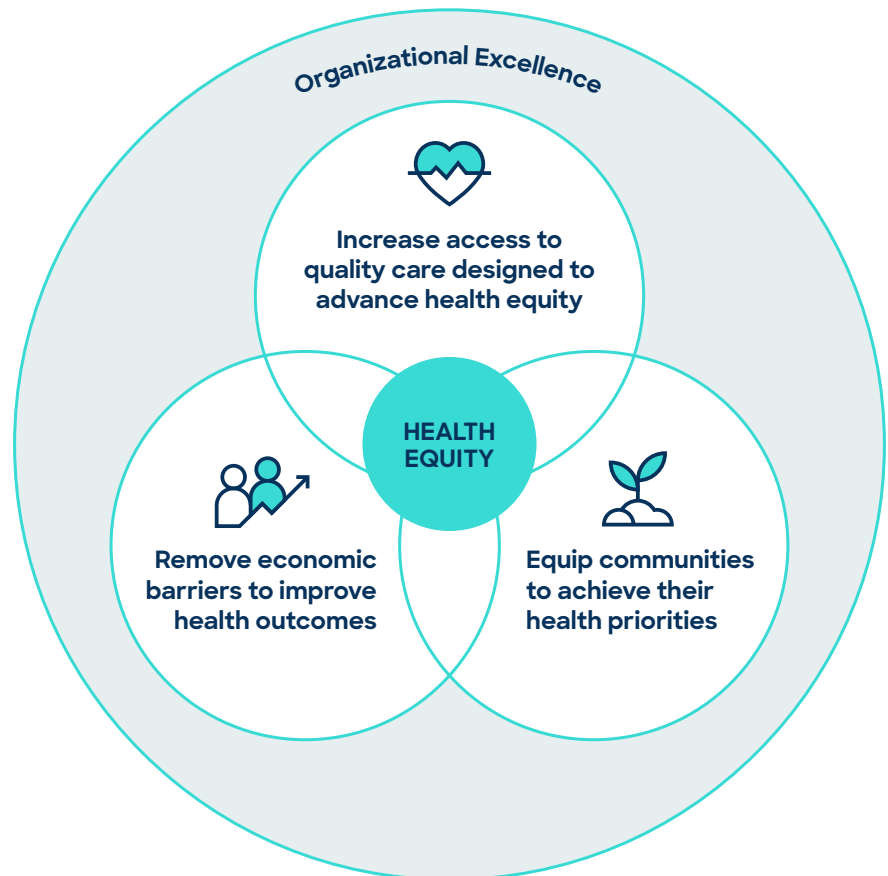
We center our work on addressing individual and systemic barriers to health for people whose income falls below the minimum level necessary for survival for a household¹ with an intentional focus on historically marginalized identity groups (*i.e.*, Black, Hispanic, women, members of the LGBTQ community, refugees, and undocumented immigrants).

Leveraging Synergies

The three external goals work together to advance health equity. **As we look to influence systems and conditions, we recognize that change does not happen in silos for individuals or systems.** Advances in one goal area will enable momentum in another.

A key lesson learned is that increased momentum and impact in our work is often found at the intersection of our goals.

It allows for internal and external collaboration and leverages staff capacity across bodies of work. To lift up and support these outwardly-facing synergies, the Foundation’s operations must be just as robust and effective. Thus, our fourth goal of organizational excellence wraps around the work of our externally facing goals.



Goal One



Increase access to quality care designed to advance health equity

ACCESS TO TIMELY, RESPONSIVE CARE remains out of reach for many Central Texans, affecting their ability to address health concerns when they arise. Cost remains a barrier to care along with lack of culturally competent quality care across the region. Nearly half of Texans report that it is somewhat or very difficult for them to afford health care (48%)².

Objectives for Improved Community Health:

In partnership with community, we will work to determine our focus, role, and impact in

- Supporting access to primary, dental, perinatal, and behavioral health services while increasing and diversifying the healthcare workforce to meet the growing demand.
- Building the capacity of healthcare infrastructure (including clinics) to provide high quality and culturally responsive care.
- Leveraging evidence to expand the number of individuals covered by insurance, the medical and non-medical benefits covered by insurance, and the ability to access the benefits to which they are currently entitled.



People don't feel comfortable with their medical providers, and they don't trust them, because they don't have enough medical providers that look like them, nor speak their native language.

Focus Group Participant



A lot of people among our population have either poor access to health care, or no access to health care, because of financial reasons.

Rural Community Listening Interview

Goal Two



Remove economic barriers to improve health outcomes

ECONOMIC STABILITY HAS AN OUTSIZED IMPACT on health and life expectancy. Research shows us that nonmedical drivers of health comprise 80% of all health outcomes, directly linking income and health. When a person cannot afford food, housing, childcare, transportation, and other basic needs, it significantly and directly affects their wellness. As our five-county region experiences rapid population growth, and the corresponding cost of living and housing rises, there is an increasing number of people who cannot make ends meet. Today, roughly one-in-three of our Central Texas neighbors are not able to earn enough to meet their basic needs³. This number grows when we look at the intersection of the groups most impacted by structural inequities.

Objectives for Improved Community Health:

In partnership with community, we will work to determine our focus, role, and impact in

- Advancing safe, healthy, and affordable housing as a platform for health and stable income creation.
- Supporting collaborative, region-wide efforts to create pathways to employment opportunities in the healthcare sector that foster economic stability for those struggling to make ends meet.
- Supporting the navigation and coordination of services addressing the economic barriers to affect health and well-being.

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[Housing] is just not affordable for a low-income family. I think when people don't have stable housing, it's hard for them to have stable employment. Those kind of things all tie together.

Focus Group Participant

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When 50% or 60% of your income is going towards rent or towards your mortgage, then you're not able to put gas in the car or go to the doctor.

Focus Group Participant

Goal Three



Equip communities to achieve their health priorities

CURRENT DAY INEQUITIES ARE ROOTED IN A HISTORY of marginalization and perpetuate disparities in health outcomes. For example, Bastrop and Caldwell counties have the largest proportions of Black and Latino populations and experience the most negative impacts of non-medical drivers of health due to structural inequities. As a result of growing disparities, some communities are experiencing significantly worse health outcomes. Addressing social and environmental conditions for generational change in these communities will require initiatives to equip and mobilize those closest to the problem⁴.

Objectives for Improved Community Health:

In partnership with community, we will work to determine our focus, role, and impact in

- Building the capacity of organizations, including our own, and systems to engage community members in decision making and leadership to foster healthier communities.
- Investing in networks and social infrastructure in historically marginalized communities to foster health and wellness.
- Supporting community-directed giving through initiatives and institutions to advance health equity.



SDF could leverage its place in its communities to continue conversations on health equity.

Community Listening Interview

Goal Four

Establish organizational excellence to be more effective and realize greater impact throughout Central Texas

WHILE ALL TEAMS ACROSS THE FOUNDATION contribute to our work in advancing health equity and meeting the needs of our community, the work has historically been siloed and missing the key element of shared goals. This strategy was developed to intentionally harness the collective power of all Foundation resources that directly impact our community – grantmaking, dental program, scholarships, learning and evaluation, and communications – along with our operational teams – community affairs, finance, grants management, human resources, information technology, and legal – as we work cross-team, in alignment to advance health equity. We also are eager to collaborate by partnering with nonprofits, peer funders, government agencies, elected officials, the public, and private sector so that, together, we can move the needle in health and wellness in a meaningful way.

This would include:

- Cultivating an organizational culture within and among all Foundation teams that facilitates excellence, enhances impact, and is committed to equity, diversity and inclusion.
- Investing in operational infrastructure to achieve greater impact.
- Implementing governance practices that amplify the Foundation’s overall effectiveness.



We strive for impact and change within our organization, mirroring the changes we seek to bring about in our community.

St. David’s Foundation Staff Member

Community Outcomes

Ultimately, we will know we are successful when we see health disparities decrease in Central Texas. Achieving this outcome will require a community-wide effort across systems and services for the benefit of future generations of Central Texans.

This journey, however, begins with meeting people where they are, and recognizing the pressing health needs of **today**. We are committed to removing barriers for individuals and families through our investments in direct services and by providing high-quality, accessible dental care. We will continue to see immediate positive impact from this work and will continue to use data to inform programmatic improvements.

The outcomes we are working to advance in the long-term – for **tomorrow** – for our community over generations are bold, interconnected, and larger than the work of the Foundation alone.

Progress towards these long-term community outcomes will reflect the Foundation's ability to influence change in new ways and with new cross-sector partners. An evaluation framework for measuring progress and impact within this plan will be developed in the coming year which will include exploring new ways to evaluate our role in complex systems change through external evaluations and sector-wide assessments.

Looking Ahead

The Foundation will dedicate 2024 to developing the infrastructure to support this new plan and shaping our focus, role, and impact for each goal. This effort will include continued community listening and opportunities to shape future funding and programmatic priorities.

As we look to focus more of our investments and action in communities with the greatest health needs in our geography, we will look for opportunities to expand our work across the five Central Texas counties we serve – Bastrop, Caldwell, Hays, Travis, and Williamson – and to utilize research and best practices, along with community input, to achieve the greatest impact. The year ahead will be dedicated to testing new ways of working that are community-focused and equity-driven. We expect to release funding opportunities aligned with the new strategic plan in the second half of 2024 that are open to current and new grantees. We invite you sign up to receive notifications and updates [here](#).

Sources

- 1 United for ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed). <https://www.unitedforalice.org/state-overview/texas>
- 2 Episcopal Health Foundation Texas Health Policy Poll. <https://www.episcopalhealth.org/enews/ehfs-new-texas-health-policy-poll-three-quarters-of-texans-say-its-very-important-for-candidates-to-focus-on-making-health-care-more-affordable-accessible/>
- 3 United for ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed). <https://www.unitedforalice.org/state-overview/texas>
- 4 Health and Democracy Index. <https://democracyindex.hdhp.us>

ST. DAVID'S FOUNDATION

is a community-focused and equity-driven organization supporting health and wellness in Central Texas. It is one of the largest health foundations in the United States, funding more than \$80 million annually in a five-county area surrounding Austin, Texas. To learn more, visit stdavidsfoundation.org.

