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# **How Communities are Using Law & Policy to Achieve Health Equity**

Below are stories of communities from across the country using law and policy to improve health for all. ChangeLab Solutions works with neighborhoods, cities, states and tribal governments to help them solve their biggest challenges. We use the tools of law and policy to create equitable change. Visit [www.changelabsolutions.org](http://www.changelabsolutions.org) to learn more.

# **Northern California City Takes Action to Curb Youth Smoking**

Since the 1990s, several physicians in Sonoma County, California, have been fighting to curb tobacco use in the rural hub of Healdsburg. They shared their concerns about youth smoking and advocated for strategies to limit youth access to tobacco products. A few years later, city officials joined the cause, and in 2014 they took action. With support and guidance from the Coalition for a Tobacco-free Sonoma County, the Sonoma County Department of Health Services and ChangeLab Solutions, they developed a robust tobacco control policy in Healdsburg centered on tobacco retailer licensing (TRL), which requires retailers to purchase a license to sell tobacco products. ChangeLab’s staff attorneys helped local officials customize a TRL policy that fit Healdsburg’s needs. The policy went into effect in July 2015, and the city became the first in the state to raise the legal age for purchasing tobacco from 18 to 21. Read more [here](http://changelabsolutions.org/publications/northern-california-city-takes-action-curb-youth-smoking).

**The Fight for Health Equity in California’s Central Valley**

Southeast Fresno is a community of immigrants and farm workers. It’s also a community where, ironically enough, residents can’t easily buy produce. The lack of access to healthy foods and public spaces for exercise and play has contributed to rising rates of chronic disease in the community. Enter ChangeLab Solutions and Cultiva La Salud. In 2006, Cultiva La Salud, launched a grassroots advocacy program aimed at equipping residents with the knowledge and tools to understand policies and city plans. ChangeLab supported Cultiva La Salud’s efforts by offering technical assistance and guidance on how to drive more equitable infrastructure investments. Together they were able to empower residents to participate in the development of their city’s Active Transportation Plan, which described how the city would make walking and biking safe, equitable and accessible for all. Read more [here](https://medium.com/changelab-solutions/the-fight-for-health-equity-in-californias-central-valley-8ff79e28db88).

**New Jersey Tackles Food Insecurity**

In Essex County, New Jersey, 17 percent of the population is food insecure, compared to the 10 percent of individuals who are food insecure in the state of New Jersey as a whole. With food insecurity affecting so many New Jerseyans and strong evidence that food insecurity is directly linked to health and education outcomes, ChangeLab Solutions decided to partner with the Greater Newark Community Advisory Board (GNCAB) and RWJBarnabas Health (RWJBH) to do something about it. As part of the effort to raise public awareness about food insecurity, the GNCAB produced a documentary chronicling food insecurity in Newark. Using insights from the documentary, ChangeLab Solutions identified and tailored policy options to improve local food systems in Newark. Fast forward to 2018, and the city is now booming with agriculture plots, farmers markets and community gardens. Read more [here](https://medium.com/changelab-solutions/nourishing-equity-fa4dbeb22b4f).

**Building safe and uplifting school environments in Richmond, California**

California schools have [twice as many police officers as social workers and nearly 1,500 students per nurse](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__www.washingtonpost.com_education_2018_12_21_schools-2Dneed-2Dcounselors-2Dnot-2Dguns-2Dother-2Dkey-2Dthings-2Dtrumps-2Dsafety-2Dcommission-2Ddid-2Dnot-2Dseriously-2Daddress_-3Futm-5Fterm-3D.bd5e307940e4&d=DwMFAg&c=B73tqXN8Ec0ocRmZHMCntw&r=OUYulK8WIpKPpLc90nBVgK-5Q0bV57z4DngoFpRxyVU&m=IofcwYP22a9iqGaRYgmMyiyBklctQMEmU-Lc6ifzgFM&s=j9DZ7SYiajBy2lRzKHIVU-ZAzZzJs_pppOpkFmuJZW8&e=). The ratio is even worse for schools with larger populations of students of color. Black middle and high school students are three times more likely than white students to attend a school with more security staff than mental health providers. This is problematic because over-policed, under-resourced environments make students feel less safe and can threaten their health and prosperity. Enter RYSE, a community-based organization dedicated to empowering the youth of Richmond. Through extensive research, RYSE has gathered insights from students about how to build uplifting school environments, where students feel safe and ready to learn. Read opinion pieces ChangeLab Solutions co-authored with RYSE [here](https://www.sfchronicle.com/opinion/openforum/article/Open-Forum-To-learn-students-need-more-13654019.php) and [here](https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2018/11/06/beware-the-unintended-consequences-of-the-school.html?utm_source=fb&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=mrss&cmp=RSS-FEED).

**Hospital Creates Homes for Residents in West Baltimore, Maryland**

Bon Secours Hospital began working on housing in West Baltimore, Maryland, after it recognized that poor health among residents was driven by unaffordable rents and residents feeling unsafe in the neighborhood where the hospital was located. Throughout the years, the hospital has created 800 homes for residents. And recently, it acquired state funding to develop a health enterprise zone to improve residents’ health. Read more [here](https://medium.com/the-block-project/partnering-for-health-housing-ad4e562ab5e8) and [here](https://medium.com/the-block-project/lets-talk-about-health-and-housing-1e4d3bcedee0).

**Alameda County Public Health Department Aims to Address Unsafe Housing**

Alameda County, California, is an epicenter of the gentrification and displacement crisis rocking the San Francisco Bay Area. As an agency committed to addressing the social determinants of health, the Alameda County Public Health Department (ACPHD) strives to understand how housing insecurity contributes to poor health and inequities. For example, their work on asthma control prompted Oakland to proactively enforce rules to protect children from exposure to mold, lead and other adverse housing conditions. They also produced a report that assessed the impact of foreclosures in Oakland’s hardest hit neighborhoods. This report led to a policy preventing utilities from shutting off tenants’ water and established a registration for vacant properties to mitigate the negative impacts of gentrification. Read more [here](https://medium.com/the-block-project/partnering-for-health-housing-ad4e562ab5e8) and [here](https://medium.com/the-block-project/lets-talk-about-health-and-housing-1e4d3bcedee0).

**Community Engagement for Healthy Housing**

The Denver Housing Authority (DHA) has long recognized the effects of housing on health and the importance of community engagement in any revitalization project. In 2009, the DHA began working on the redevelopment of a 270 public housing unit known as Mariposa. As part of the redevelopment, the DHA gathered input from residents on what they needed to live well. In response to the residents’ desires, it developed convenient and reliable transit options to get them to good paying jobs, schools and other health promoting opportunities. As a result, residents of Mariposa have reported leading healthier, more active lives and feel extremely proud of their new homes. Read more [here](https://medium.com/the-block-project/partnering-for-health-housing-ad4e562ab5e8) and [here](https://medium.com/the-block-project/lets-talk-about-health-and-housing-1e4d3bcedee0).

**Shared Use in Salt Lake County, Utah, Helps Tongan Americans Be More Active**

For years, Tongan Americans had the highest rates of obesity in Utah. Determined to get to the root of the problem, the Salt Lake City-based [National Tongan American Society](http://ntasutah.org/about-us.html) (NTAS) decided to survey the community and found that Tongans were less physically active because they did not have exercise equipment. To address this problem, NTAS contacted ChangeLab Solutions for help in developing shared use agreements. As a result of NTAS’s efforts, six churches, five schools and one community center agreed to open their recreation rooms, basketball and tennis courts and running tracks for public use. Read more [here](http://changelabsolutions.org/publications/making-active-choice-easier-tongan-americans) and [here](http://changelabsolutions.org/publications/shared-use-playbook).