

The [Center for Sharing Public Health Services \(CSPHS\)](#) and the [Public Health National Center for Innovation \(PHNCI\)](#) are leading the [Crossector Innovation Initiative \(CSII\)](#), a three-year endeavor to identify and support public health, healthcare, social services, and community organizations striving to build stronger, sustainable communities and systems that can more effectively address the needs of communities and ultimately improve health equity. The CSII is comprised of projects working toward specific population health goals through systems alignment efforts. The wide range of population health and equity issues being addressed by CSII grantees include:

Breastfeeding	Housing	Substance use
Equitable birth outcomes	Mental health	disorder
Family violence	Physical activity	Tobacco prevention
Food security	Social connectedness	Trauma-informed care
	Structural racism	

This document summarizes the content of progress reports by grantees covering the period between July and December 2020. Additionally, specific examples of grantees building sustainable collaborations are outlined in a typical brief series, where addressing health equity and population health, aligning across sectors, community and partner engagement, and solving complex problems through innovation are discussed in more detail.

General Findings

CSII grantees, with their community partners, have continued working to align sectors to improve population health, well-being, and equity. Progress reported from all grantees highlighted the continued effect that the COVID-19 pandemic and the increased focus on racial equity and justice had on their initiatives. While some work has been delayed, many activities have been shifted, bright spots have emerged as partners continue effective collaboration to improve the health of communities.

COVID-19 Pandemic

CSII grantees, especially public health department partners, reported continued changes in their activities because it has been necessary to shift COVID-19 response efforts nationwide. All grantees have pivoted to activities that best meet the needs of the communities they serve, including increasing access to COVID testing, disseminating necessary information, distributing personal protective equipment to community members, and supporting under-resourced communities and populations that have been disenfranchised. Services delivered to residents experiencing economic insecurity as a result of the pandemic, including increasing virtual programming and telehealth opportunities. Fortunately, the CSII grantee cross-sector relationships successfully prepared grant partners to address these community priorities and plan for future needs. Additionally, despite these impacts, CSII grantees shared that working together to combat COVID-19 has strengthened relationships and strengthened commitment to sustain partnerships.

Racial Equity and Justice

CSII grantees reported that COVID-19 unearthed structural and systemic racism in their communities as inequities in infection and hospitalization rates and in access to testing and vaccination are apparent and disproportionately affected communities of color. Additionally, the nationwide activism for racial equity and justice continued to increase as more instances of police violence reached the public health and public safety systems, and CSII grantees reported that more people, including policy

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makers and local leaders, are willing to speak openly about racial injustices and white privilege. CSII grantees also reported the expanded awareness of racial justice helped to clarify the importance of their work and get it right, and more CSII grantees are now viewing current and future policies with an equity lens, working toward shifting power from institutions to communities, conducting organizational equity assessments, and endorsing equity trainings for their staff.

Addressing Health Equity and Population Health

Since its inception, the CSII has supported community-driven efforts that improve population health, address social determinants of health, and mitigate health inequities (i.e., differences in health that are unnecessary, avoidable, unfair, and unjust). All CSII grantees were required to specify a goal or goals to improve population health and advance health equity. The [Addressing Health Equity and Population Health topical brief](#) describes in detail CSII grantees' work to address a variety of health equity and population health issues, including structural racism, affordable housing, food security, behavioral health, social connectedness, trauma-informed care, and more. Additionally, the brief illustrates some of their health equity and population health efforts and summarizes common experiences shared by CSII grantees, in addition to highlighting bright spots and challenges experienced.

Key Points:

- COVID-19 and increased calls for racial justice caused shifts in activities to focus more deeply on structural racism and pandemic response efforts.
- Funding provided to community members to implement innovative, community-driven solutions contributed to the advancement of health equity and population health goals.
- Declaring racism a public health crisis will support increased emphasis on racial equity when collaboratives consider current and future policies targeted at addressing population health.
- There are solutions that can be implemented to address common challenges around capacity constraints, language barriers, and population silos.

Aligning Partnerships Across Sectors

By working across sectors to advance health equity and population health, partners public health, healthcare, social services, and community organizations, among others, can systematically build stronger, sustainable connections and systems that can more effectively address the needs of communities. Systems alignment strategies allow collaboratives to work towards sustainability and ensure joint efforts are built to last and offer greater impact. The [Aligning Partnerships Across Sectors topical brief](#) highlights sector alignment work among CSII grantees as they strive to align systems for future sustainability.

Key Points:

- Successful examples of systems alignment efforts among collaborative sectors include a shared purpose, data, governance, and financing.
- Public health departments play a vital role in cross-sector collaboration, especially during times of crisis.
- Healthcare, social services, and community partners, among others, also contribute important expertise and support to collaboratives.
- Systems alignment takes effort to make sustainable progress toward improving health and well-being in communities.

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Community and Partner Engagement

Community and partner engagement can be a powerful tool for driving and sustaining cross-sector public health initiatives. Community voice is an important adaptive factor supporting collaborative cross-sector partnerships for improving health in a community, and true community engagement pushes lead agencies to seek out, value, and uplift the often overlooked and underappreciated experience and expertise in their communities. The [Community and Partner Engagement topical brief](#) focuses on the value and importance of community engagement to CSII grantees' work, and how grantees are making intentional efforts to support and grow genuine community and partner engagement. While the specific challenges encountered and approaches taken by each collaborative vary, some common challenges and areas of focus are diverse membership and participation, elevating community voice, and continuously building trust.

Key Points:

- Creating welcoming spaces – by using preferred language or responding to community member concerns – is important to ensure community members can fully participate and contribute to the collaborative work. Techniques from the [Collaborative Trust Scale](#) and the [Collective Impact Model](#) may offer useful approaches.
- Financially compensating community members for their contributions recognizes their expertise, demonstrates commitment to their participation, and ensures their voice is heard in the collaborative.
- Failure to deliver on promises made to community members can dissolve trust quickly.

Solving Complex Problems through Innovation

Public health innovation refers to the creation and implementation of a novel process, policy, product, program, or system leading to improvements that impact health and equity. The [Solving Complex Problems through Innovation topical brief](#) highlights some of the innovative work from CSII grantees, specifically around equity, community engagement, systems alignment, and COVID-19 pandemic response efforts. To meet the needs of the communities they serve, CSII grantees worked with the community on novel solutions to big challenges. Weaved throughout these efforts is innovation, which has shown up in each grantee project at different stages and to various degrees.

Key Points:

- Innovation processes can be applied to help guide an organization as they problem solve.
- Use a tool — like an equity assessment — to systematically identify where to focus capacity building efforts and address systemic racism and gather data to inform decisions.
- Value community voice through mini grants, stipends, and professional opportunities, which demonstrates that organizations respect and listen to community members.
- Innovation does not need to be grand. COVID-19 required innovative thinking on a regular basis that was not always tracked by grantees.

CSII continues to collect data and stories from grantees and shares them with the field in the hopes that other communities can learn from and replicate alignment efforts. Visit <https://phnci.org/cross-sector/csii> and <https://phsharing.org/cross-sector-innovation-initiative/> to stay up to date with the latest information.