Public Health
Seattle & King County

HEARCAG

Health Equity and Anti-racism Community Advisory Group

Centering Community-led Solutions to Create a Virtuous Cycle of Investment in Health

A Vision for Improved Budgeting in King County and Washington State

What does the paper recommend?

The Brown Paper is organized around **five key ideas**:

1. Lead with anti-racism
Budget decisions should align with King County's declaration that racism is a public health crisis and should intentionally address longstanding inequities.

2. Center communities with the greatest need
Investments should prioritize communities that have experienced the greatest health inequities and barriers to opportunity, particularly Black, Indigenous, Pacific Islander, Latino, immigrant, refugee, and other historically marginalized communities.

3. Shift power and resources to community
Communities should have a meaningful voice in determining how public dollars are spent through approaches such as participatory budgeting and community-led decision making.

4. Create more equitable funding systems
The paper calls for funding processes that are more accessible to grassroots and community-based organizations and that provide stable, long-term support rather than short-term pilot funding.

5. Address root causes
Public investments should focus on the underlying conditions that drive health and wellbeing, including housing, transportation, education, economic stability, and community health.

What is this Brown Paper?

The HEARCAG Policy Brown Paper was created by the Health Equity and Anti-Racism Community Advisory Group (HEARCAG), a body that collaborates with Public Health - Seattle & King County. It argues that improving health outcomes requires more than healthcare; it also demands addressing the social, economic, and systemic factors that shape people's lives and opportunities. The paper synthesizes community insights, health data, and research to advocate for reallocating public resources toward prevention, community well-being, and health equity, particularly to support communities most affected by racism and disinvestment.

What problem is the paper trying to solve?

The paper highlights three major concerns: Significant racial and geographic health inequities continue to exist in King County and across Washington State.

Public systems often spend more money responding to crises after they occur than preventing them in the first place. Communities most impacted by inequities often have the least influence over decisions about public investments and policies.

HEARCAG members argue that current approaches create a "vicious cycle" in which poverty, poor health outcomes, and involvement with punitive systems reinforce one another across generations.

What is the central message?
The paper's core message is simple:
If we want healthier communities, we need to invest upstream.

Rather than spending the majority of public resources responding to harm after it occurs, governments should invest in the conditions that help people thrive from the beginning, including:

- Stable housing
- Quality education
- Accessible healthcare
- Mental and behavioral health supports
- Economic opportunity
- Community-driven solutions
- Public health infrastructure

The paper calls this moving from a**"vicious cycle" to a "virtuous cycle"** of investment and wellbeing.

Spread the word!

Core Messaging

"This paper argues that healthier communities are created when we invest in prevention, community leadership, and the conditions people need to thrive. Rather than waiting to respond to crises, it calls for public funding and policies that address root causes, advance equity, and empower communities to shape the decisions that affect their lives."

Key takeaway

The paper calls for a shift from reactive spending to proactive investment, from systems that manage harm to systems that help communities thrive, and from top-down decision making to community-led solutions.

What distinguishes this publication?

We believe health is fostered in our neighborhoods, educational institutions, workplaces, residences, and communities. HEARCAG maintains that key factors influencing health outcomes include social determinants, such as access to housing, economic opportunities, safe communal environments, social connectivity, and environmental conditions. We contend that community-led organizations are often best positioned to develop solutions because of their proximity to those most affected.

This paper is ultimately about creating conditions where **everyone can thrive**.

Its recommendations **influence**:

- How public dollars are invested
- Which organizations receive funding
- How communities participate in decision making
- The availability of health, behavioral health, and family support services
- Long-term strategies to reduce inequities across King County and Washington State