

POPULATION HEALTH FORUMS

Improving Health Outcomes in Under-served Communities

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A new season of Population Health Forums was kicked off by MaryLynn Ostrowski, PhD, Executive Director of the Aetna Foundation, an organization dedicated to improving health in local communities and large populations. Dr. Ostrowski is responsible for the daily operations of the regional, national, and international programs.

Dr. Ostrowski began the presentation by pointing out the opportunities for improving health and emphasized the endless potential in our communities. "Good health happens outside of the doctor's office," explains Ostrowski. Factors such as physical activity can reduce risks for chronic illnesses. Other factors leading to opportunities include: where you live can have a direct impact on your health; cities have the power to become health hubs for a growing population; and walkability matters. Dr. Ostrowski discussed the tendency to place all onus on the individual, yet she explained, "how do we make an individual accountable without access?"

The Aetna Foundation is very interested in looking at best practices and changing the social determinants of health. Through national and local grants, the Aetna Foundation is focused on the following goals and approaches: building healthy cities, and rewarding and recognizing best practices; creating healthy communities; and thought leadership for policy impact.

Dr. Ostrowski went on to describe some of the impact areas making a difference. For example, in an effort to address community safety, East Stroudsburg, PA implemented a program aimed at tackling mental health in penal system reform; and York, PA initiated a program to help identify lead exposure, in response to addressing environmental exposures. Ostrowski also identified national early adopter innovator cities/counties:

- Tulsa City, Oklahoma - The health department is engaging community partners to help address food desert issues.
- San Diego County, California – Live Well San Diego focuses on urban agriculture, bike ability, improving community aesthetics through artwork, and increasing

community capacity for leadership and civic engagement.

- Kansas City, Missouri –Through the Kansas City Health Department, Aim4Peace is working to reduce the epidemic of crime by providing at-risk Kansas City residents with health resources, job readiness assistance, conflict resolution and family counseling.

Aetna's Cultivating Healthy Communities program involves a response and strategy for addressing and recognizing: healthy behaviors, built environment, environmental exposures, community safety and social and economic factors. These are the domains that drive the work of the Foundation.

Dr. Ostrowski emphasized the importance of having a significant consumer engagement strategy; developing local partnerships, involving different sectors and those with different roles; and that infrastructure extends and saves lives.

To view slides and listen to audio recordings of Population Health Forums visit: JDC.Jefferson.edu/hpforum/

