



Webinar

Improve community health by strengthening social connections

February 17, 2026

countyhealthrankings.org



1



Guidelines

1
Share
successes and
lessons learned

2
Offer
resources

3
Build
knowledge

4
Listen
for multiple
perspectives

2

 County Health Rankings & Roadmaps



Disclosures

- Views do not represent the University of Wisconsin Madison or the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.
- Expertise of a CHR&R team of 35+ members is reflected and highly valued.
- Funding support from RWJF is appreciated.

3

 County Health Rankings & Roadmaps

We value



University of Wisconsin
Population Health Institute
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND PUBLIC HEALTH



- Collaboration
- Innovation
- Courage
- Inclusion
- Excellence
- Integrity

4

County Health
Rankings & Roadmaps

Join the conversation

Question and Answer

Welcome to Q&A
Questions you ask will show up here. Only host and panelists will be able to see all questions.

Where can I find strategies to address children in poverty?

Send anonymously

Who can see your questions?

Webinar Chat

Me to Everyone

JL Hi Everyone, I'm James, from Madison, WI.

Zoomhost CHRR to Everyone

Hello James and welcome to today's webinar.

Who can see your messages?

To: Everyone

Your text can be seen by panelists and other attendees

5

County Health
Rankings & Roadmaps

Group agreements

1. Listen actively
2. Participate fully
3. Speak from your experience
4. Lead with curiosity
5. Be conscious of body language
6. Expect ambiguity
7. Be accountable

6

11

Narratives for Health Advisors and Contracted Partners (Past and Present)



12

 County Health Rankings & Roadmaps

Partner Highlight

 **HEALTHY PLACES BY DESIGN**

13

 County Health Rankings & Roadmaps

Welcome



Risa Wilkerson
Healthy Places by Design



Joanne Lee
Healthy Places by Design

14





Discussion group

When: Following the webinar

What: Share ideas, ask questions

How: Zoom

Why: Deepen learning



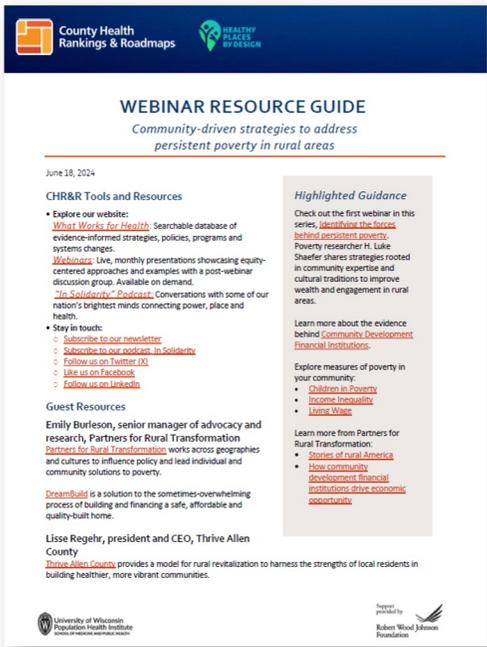
15





Resource guide

Coming to your inbox soon



16



Advancing community-led action and proven, place-based strategies to ensure health and wellbeing for all.

www.healthyplacesbydesign.org



17

Healthy Places by Design's Services



Consulting and Advising



Learning and Networking



Community Leadership



Field Building

18

Loneliness vs. Social Isolation

Loneliness

An unpleasant or distressing feeling of a lack of social connection and a desire for more (or more satisfying) relationships.

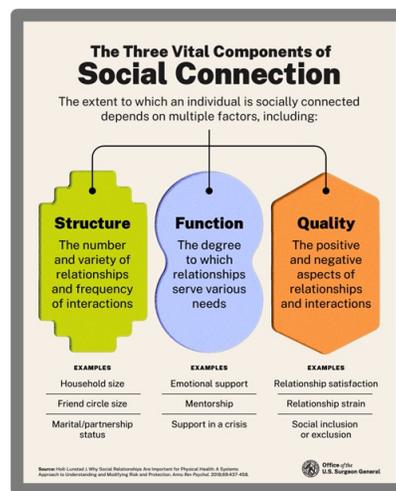
Social Isolation

Having objectively few social relationships, roles, group memberships, and infrequent social interaction.

What is Social Connection?

Social Connection

Having a variety of high-quality relationships that you can rely on.



Impact on Health and Economy



Physical Health

- 26-32% higher risk for premature mortality
- Cardiovascular Disease
- Type 2 diabetes
- Immune and respiratory illnesses



Economic Health

- \$6.7B in Medicare spending
- Lower productivity
- More absenteeism
- Lower quality of work



Mental & Behavioral Health

- Depression and anxiety
- Suicidality
- Addiction



Cognitive Health

- Cognitive decline
- Dementia
- Alzheimer's disease

Community Health and Social Connections

21

21

Who Experiences Social Isolation?

All ages, demographics, and identities

- Caregivers (including new mothers)
- New residents (including recent immigrants)
- Chronically ill, experiencing disabilities
- Older adults, Gen Z, and at-risk youth
- Rural residents
- Financially challenged
- Those who feel they don't belong to majority social groups

Community Health and Social Connections

22

22



“Given the significant health consequences of loneliness and isolation, we must prioritize building social connection the same way we have prioritized other critical public health issues such as tobacco, obesity, and substance use disorders.

Together, we can build a country that’s healthier, more resilient, less lonely, and more connected.”

U.S. SURGEON GENERAL DR. VIVEK MURTHY

23

Strong social connections and networks can boost a person’s survival by 50 percent.



Source: Scientific American

24

Social isolation is rooted in community design, social norms, and systemic injustices.

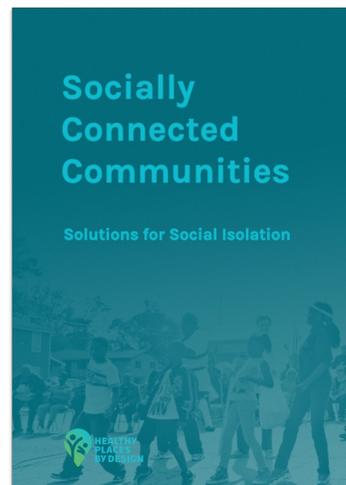


25

Recommendations

1. Design, Maintain, and Activate Inclusive **Public Spaces**
2. Prioritize Connection in **Transportation** Systems
3. Construct **Housing** Environments that Build Community
4. Invest in Inclusive Practices and **Community-led Solutions**
5. Make Social Connectedness a **Community Norm**

https://healthyplacesbydesign.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Socially-Connected-Communities_Solutions-for-Social-Isolation.pdf



Community Health and Social Connections

26

26



Public Spaces

- ✓ Design safe places for all ages to gather
- ✓ Equitably maintain the quality of public spaces
- ✓ Activate public spaces to encourage healthy social interaction
- ✓ Co-create inclusive, healthy public spaces

27



Transportation

- ✓ Think "people first"
- ✓ Use policy levers to promote health and equity
- ✓ Support elements that enhance public life

28



Housing

- ✓ Strengthen and safeguard inclusive, affordable housing
- ✓ Include spaces specifically designed for gathering
- ✓ Housing first strategies

29

Community-Led Solutions

Invest in Inclusive Practices and Community-led Solutions

- Shift power to community members
- Elevate practices rooted in culture
- Harness creative communications channels
- Create universal broadband access

Make Social Connectedness a Community Norm

- Use a “Social in All Policies” framework
- Implement trauma- and resilience-informed practices
- Declare community values

30

Built Environment Impacts

- More social capital
- More diversity in the types of interactions and relationships
- Greater belonging and sense of place
- Better social health markers
- Increased civic engagement, community resilience, and preparedness

<https://www.social-connection.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/The-SOCIAL-Framework-Built-Environment-Spring-2024-v2.pdf>



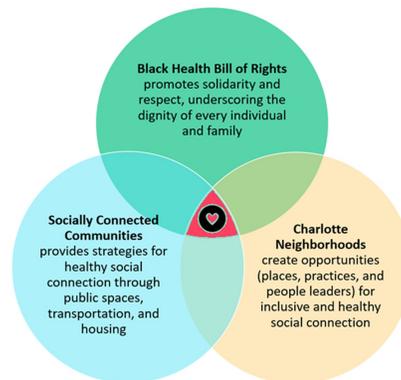
Community Health and Social Connections

31

31

Supporting Black Health in Charlotte

- Strong Black leaders
- Rich history to build upon
- Concerns about displacement
- Pilot project:
 - Compared reports
 - Capitalized on strengths
 - Strengthened peer networks
 - Developed action plans



Community Health and Social Connections

32

32

Activating Boston

Photo credit: Lee Daniel-Tran

- Focus on public greenspaces
- Strong community engagement
- Celebrates history and culture
- Expanded to seven projects in four neighborhoods



Community Health and Social Connections

33

33

Tips for Public Health Practitioners

- Audit organizational practices and policies
- Host communitywide conversations on social connection
- Use a “Social in All Policies” framework
- Engage community in collecting and utilizing data

34

34

Narratives for Health Initiative

Healthy Places by Design's Roles

- Train-the facilitator cohorts
- Action Group for socially connected communities
- Transformative narratives for socially connected communities
- Tips for developing issue-specific narratives



Community Health and Social Connections

35

35

Transformative Narratives

Shift dominant narratives by developing and diffusing transformative narratives to advance structural change for an issue.



Image credit: Yolanda Liman



Community Health and Social Connections

36

36

Dominant Narratives

- Individualism
- Health and wellbeing are not interconnected.
- Scarcity, Zero-sum game
- “If you get out and socialize more, you won’t be lonely.”
- “Feeling lonely or isolated is not a health issue.”
- “We don’t have enough funding to fix all mental health problems.”

Community Health and Social Connections

37

37

Dominant Narratives

- Themes that influence decision making, policies, resources, and practices in communities.
- Often more influential than facts.
- Created, often by people with power to advance their beliefs and values.
- Become dominant when they are:
 - Held by many people at a moment in time,
 - Embedded in institutions, systems, and norms.

Community Health and Social Connections

38

38

Narrative Development

- Identify a key issue to be addressed collectively.
- Build relationships.
- Co-develop a shared understanding.
- Co-create transformative narratives.
- Apply and disseminate.
- Engage in ongoing learning and development.

https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/sites/default/files/media/document/NFH_Guide.pdf

Developing Issue-Specific Transformative Narratives

- 1. Identify a key issue to be addressed**
 - Form or validate objective and subjective data. What are the causes of persistent health inequities in the community?
 - Obtain new data to help you clarify and define the issue you want to address with a transformative narrative. What do community members say they care about?
 - Consider existing decisions and policies that need to be changed to achieve better health equity. What policies are creating systemic harm?
- 2. Build relationships with narrative partners**
 - Form alliances with people and groups who care about the issue. Who has expertise and experience addressing the issue? Who has direct lived experience with the issue?
 - Build and maintain trust and meaningful relationships with narrative building partners. What are your partners' experiences, values and beliefs?
- 3. Co-develop a shared understanding of narratives**
 - Ensure partners are operating from a common definition of "narratives." Are all partners clear that narratives are grounding values and beliefs?
 - Expose current dominant narratives that are getting in the way of health equity. What harmful messages do you hear from powerful decisionmakers and in the media?
 - Understand the power of narratives. What are the values underlying current harmful policies and practices?
- 4. Co-create transformative narratives**
 - Engage in open and iterative conversations about shared values and beliefs that influence your partners' commitment to health equity. What are your partners' health equity experiences and stories?
 - Document key values and beliefs that will shape a transformative narrative. What are the core set of values that need to be expressed to offer an alternative view?
 - Enlist willing partners who can draft, mean test and submit for the transformative narratives. How can main narrative statements be written in bold and compelling ways?
- 5. Apply and disseminate transformative narratives**
 - Identify how each partner can apply the transformative narratives within their professional and personal efforts. How can each partner meaningfully use the transformative narratives?
 - Agree upon collective actions that the group can take that will result in complementary and integrated impact. What unique assets can each partner leverage for collective impact?
 - Enlist support to build ongoing narrative capacity. What training does your partnership need?
- 6. Engage in ongoing development of narratives**
 - Stay aware of the dominant narratives that are operating at a given time. Have new dominant narratives appeared that are challenging health equity?
 - Regularly and intentionally review the transformative narratives and make necessary updates. Are there any values and beliefs that need to be more strongly conveyed to achieve your vision?

Narrative Development



Narrative Development

Values and Beliefs to Create Socially Connected Communities

Inclusion * Belonging * Bridging * Resilience * Well-being
 Unity * Harmony * Interdependence * Interconnectedness * Collective impact
 Honoring differences * Anti-othering * Reducing stigma * Loneliness is a human experience
 Community-level solutions * Sharing resources * Valuing social capital * Countering scarcity
 Representation in leadership * Accountability for power imbalances

Community Health and Social Connections

41

41

Socially Connected Communities Narratives

- We embrace the range and variations of feelings and experiences that make us whole and thriving beings.
- Diversity and belonging must co-exist for our communities to thrive.
- Shared responsibility and interconnectedness are required to achieve optimal health and wellbeing for each of us and all of us.
- Social connectedness, loneliness, and isolation must be addressed through community-level solutions.
- We advocate for public and community policies and practices that prioritize social connectedness and wellbeing for all.
- We strive to advance people impacted and harmed by loneliness and disconnection, and share power in our communities.

Community Health and Social Connections

42

42

Applying Narratives

- Ground narratives in community context.
- Identify nuances of power to shift harmful narratives.
- Adapt language while holding core values.



Community Health and Social Connections

43

43

Resources to Take Action

- **Socially Connected Communities: Solutions for Social Isolation**, Healthy Places by Design, <https://healthyplacesbydesign.org/socially-connected-communities-solutions-for-social-isolation/>
- **Essential Resources for Socially Connected Communities**, Healthy Places by Design, <https://healthyplacesbydesign.org/essential-resources-for-socially-connected-communities/>
- **Action Guide for Building Socially Connected Communities**, Foundation for Social Connection and Healthy Places by Design, <https://action4connection.org/>
- **Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation**, U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory, <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>
- **From Loneliness to Social Connection**, WHO Commission on Social Connection, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/978240112360>

Community Health and Social Connections

44

44



© 2026 Healthy Places by Design,
fiscally sponsored by Third Sector New England, Inc.
All rights reserved.

Engage with us!



LinkedIn

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/healthy-places-by-design>



Newsletter

<https://bit.ly/HPbDNewsletterSignUp>



YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/@HealthyPlacesbyDesign>



County Health
Rankings & Roadmaps

Questions?





County Health
Rankings & Roadmaps

**Click on
survey in
the chat**



47



County Health
Rankings & Roadmaps

Upcoming webinar:

March 31, 2026

**Making the
Most of
CHR&R's
Latest Data
and Evidence
Resources**



Molly Burdine
Data Analyst



Keith Gennuso
Population Health Research
Team Leader



Molly Neumeyer
User Experience Architect



Naiya Patel
Evidence Analyst

48



County Health Rankings & Roadmaps



Discussion group

When: Following the webinar

What: Share ideas, ask questions

How: Zoom

Why: Deepen learning



49



County Health Rankings & Roadmaps

Webinar

Thank You!

countyhealthrankings.org



University of Wisconsin
Population Health Institute
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Support provided by



Robert Wood Johnson
Foundation

50



County Health
Rankings & Roadmaps

Stay connected



Sign up for our newsletter
CountyHealthRankings.org/subscribe



Follow [@CHRankings](https://twitter.com/CHRankings)



Facebook.com/CountyHealthRankings



Linkedin.com/company/county-health-rankings-roadmaps