

Equality Health Foundation Focuses on Forging Connections

Its purpose-driven mission aims to reduce health disparities

by Tyler Butler

► Convene, collaborate and build. These are the three principles that guide Equality Health Foundation's social impact work. The organization's bold goal to advance access to health and well-being in diverse and under-resourced communities has elevated its ability to influence positive change. And with the lens of its diverse board, Equality Health Foundation is eliminating health disparities, expanding access to care, accelerating health education and building a network of partners, supporting overall healthier and more vibrant communities throughout Arizona.

As the dueling pandemics of 2020 hit, the Foundation recognized it was at a crossroad. The community's needs had shifted overnight and, with this, the foundation's focus. The need was clear: Efforts had to focus on closing disparity gaps and opening doors to good health. So, the Foundation pivoted efforts to center on COVID-19 and inequalities in access to testing and vaccines, as well as on the societal unease and awareness of social justice, racism and inequalities in the state.

Through an unparalleled community partnership strategy, Equality Health Foundation mobilized resources to meet the physical, mental and socioeconomic needs of individuals and families where they were in life while concurrently designing long-term solutions to address root cause issues. Hugh Lytle, founder and board member of Equality Health Foundation, shares, "Thanks to the Foundation, we have even more opportunities to support collaborations, innovations and programs. I believe that, together, we can effect lasting change that will ensure equal health for all."

One such partnership brought Equality Health Foundation to collaborate with Chicanos Por La Causa and the R.A.P.I.D Community-Based COVID-19 Testing Coalition. The Foundation convened more than 100 diverse public- and private-sector partners with the mission to align resources and meet COVID-19 head-on in communities with the greatest need and least access to resources. Yet another collaboration partnered Equality Health Foundation and the HeroZona Foundation with the One Community Initiative to launch comprehensive COVID-19 testing and vaccination operations targeting the hardest hit neighborhoods and communities.

The Foundation's RADx-UP Grants have highlighted the crucial role and work of community health workers (CHW) as essential to addressing disparities in care, delivery and health outcomes in vulnerable populations. Through a partnership with Arizona State University, the Foundation designed a culturally competent, CHW-led COVID-19 testing model: "Addressing Healthcare Barriers with a Community-University Led Response to COVID-19 in Arizona." This partnership and innovative model led to securing four multi-year federal grants from the National Institutes of Health, bringing nearly \$2.5 million in resources to Arizona.



These grants enabled expanded efforts, creating an opportunity to engage and contract with several CHW organizations. With support from the Arizona Community Health Workers Association in the counties of Maricopa, Yuma and Pima, as well as the San Carlos Apache Tribe, this program administered saliva-based testing and provided essential sociocultural support services. These partnerships helped maintain the CHW workforce and ensure public health during a pandemic when CHW organizations struggled to secure grants and donations to sustain their workforce.

"Equality Health Foundation is creating meaningful and lasting change by improving health and the quality of life in communities, and we're excited to explore innovations that create a better today and tomorrow for all residents. Higher well-being and health are key to help the entire city of Phoenix rise from the pandemic stronger and better than before," says Kate Gallego, mayor of Phoenix.

The most impressive recent accomplishment for Equality Health Foundation is perhaps its Blue Zones Activate initiative. This work focuses on the single largest determinant of health: the place where we live. This comprehensive place-based approach has the potential to boost well-being of the entire region and reduce health disparities that impact quality and longevity of life and community resilience for current and future generations.

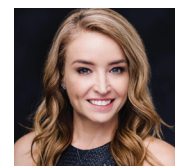
As Tomás León, president of Equality Health Foundation, has said, "Growing evidence is showing that our zip code is a bigger predictor of our health, well-being and longevity than our genetic code. Equality Health Foundation supports a focus on improving the whole health and resiliency of diverse populations." With Equality Health Foundation joining forces with Greater South Phoenix residents, community stakeholders and policy makers, in partnership with Blue Zones, the region will achieve its highest potential in being a healthy place to live, work, learn, play, pray and thrive.

Through a purpose-driven mission centered on reducing health disparities, expanding access to care and accelerating health education, the Foundation is committed to advancing health equity for all individuals. The impact of Equality Health Foundation's initiatives continues to create a positive, hopeful, lasting, ripple effect within the community. And will continue to do so for many generations to come thanks to their connected model of cooperation and partnership. ■

Equality Health Foundation equalityhealthfoundation.org

EQUALITY HEALTH FOUNDATION STAND-OUT STATS

- Healthy Fall Festival events provided nearly 20,000 children, seniors and families with access to health-enabling resources to help reach their highest potential for health.
- The comprehensive COVID-19 testing and vaccination operation, focused on the hardest hit neighborhoods, helping nearly 90,000 residents become more fully protected from the virus.
- During the COVID-19 program, Equality Health Foundation contracted with 51 woman- and minority-owned businesses struggling to survive, among them All About Food, Arvizo Advertising and Promotions, Bencomo Rentals, El Portal Restaurant, Helping Families in Need. These entrepreneurs not only stayed in business but helped meet a vital need in the community.
- The Blue Zones Activate Greater South Phoenix initiative has enabled more than 240,000 residents to experience greater well-being, optimal health and improved longevity.



Tyler Butler is a chief social impact officer for a publicly traded corporate portfolio where she leads programs that positively impact humanity. She is also the founder of 11Eleven Consulting and she is often cited as a subject matter expert by *Forbes*, *SHRM*, *Entrepreneur*, *U.S. News & World Report* and more. [linkedin.com/in/tylerbutler](https://www.linkedin.com/in/tylerbutler)

