

Soaring Demand, Declining Resources in Public Health

A Guide to Overcoming Funding Challenges to Meet Public Health Needs

Insights to Practice, the Public Health Communications Collaborative's (PHCC) [annual virtual conference](#), took place on June 2, 2026, and focused on the latest research and perspectives critical to advancing public health communications.

Among the conference sessions was *Soaring Demand, Declining Resources: Overcoming Funding Challenges to Meet Community Public Health Needs*. It offered tips and best practices for how public health professionals can best communicate and advocate for the resources they need to advance public health in their communities. This Guide elevates the topics discussed during the session and the practical insights that were shared.

Making the Economic Case for Public Health

To meet this moment in which demand is rising while resources are scarce, public health communicators can:

- Connect public health to what policymakers and decision-makers already view as non-negotiable.
- Lead with language that focuses on return on investment.
- Emphasize language that shows public health as an integrated system, versus as a service.

The more public health can be tied to what leaders already prioritize, the easier it can be to shift mindsets from *can we afford public health* to *can we afford for society to fail*. Natalie Burke suggests doing this by framing public health as society's operating system. With a strong

Session participants

Moderator

- Monica Valdes Lupi, Managing Director, Health, at The Kresge Foundation

Panelists

- Natalie S. Burke, President and CEO of CommonHealth ACTION
- Rachel Baird, Program Officer with Episcopal Health Foundation
- Tori Cope, Senior Strategist - Initiatives at the Missouri Foundation for Health.



public health operating system, every outcome that leaders prioritize becomes possible, from workforce readiness to economic growth to community resilience.

When investments are made in that operating system, research suggests the returns in the form of savings can be significant, with each \$1 spent saving \$14. Using language that directly connects public health to a community's success, rather than softer language that positions public health as helping and supporting, can make it more difficult to push back against the value of public health.

“It becomes much harder to pluck public health out when we demonstrate that we are that operating system, and that we are wholly integrated into the work of the nation.”

NATALIE BURKE, COMMONHEALTH ACTION

Building Relationships and Seeking Funding, Strategically

Knowing how to work with funders before and while funding strategies shift is critical to navigating periods of rising demand and reduced resources. Together, Rachel Baird and Tori Cope offered a series of suggestions public health communicators can consider when confronting a period like this:

- **Do your homework.** Before approaching a current or prospective funder, review available online resources and an organization's Form 990 (an annual, informational return most nonprofits are required to file with the Internal Revenue Service). See what they have funded in the past and what their current priorities appear to be to help frame a new or continued case for support.
- **Don't be shy.** Periods of uncertainty and stress can lead to inaction. Instead, move to action and ask for conversations, connections, and meetings. Even if a prospective funder is not the right fit, many know the key players and they may be willing to help make connections.
- **Be engaged in your community.** Funders are interested in organizations that are part of or are leading critical conversations. Be able to show the involvement of community voice in your work to maintain and sustain impact.
- **Make connections.** Attend information sessions hosted by funders at conferences that may be open to public health professionals and nonprofits to build relationships. And look for opportunities to join public health associations or other organizations to extend your voice and visibility to maximize impact.

“Before you approach funders, develop a theory on your own and determine where you fit into the larger ecosystem.”

RACHEL BAIRD, EPISCOPAL HEALTH FOUNDATION



Beyond Funding: Important Reminders and Useful Resources

It can be difficult to remember to invest in yourself during demanding times, but it is important to care for your professional growth and ability to advance your work in public health.

- Make sure to regularly assess your current professional networks and consider which networks, within and outside of public health, would help you carry out your work. Consider what you need your network to be, not simply what it looks like today.
- Pursue training opportunities, especially beyond traditional public health topics. Look for ways to grow your knowledge in areas like legislative processes that could help you and your organization achieve the impact you desire.
- Explore [Insights to Practice](#) conference topics, access session resources on public health funding challenges, and browse additional tools for public health professionals:
 - » [Michigan Hubs](#)
 - » [Catchafire: Go beyond the grant](#)
 - » [Benevity for Nonprofits | Access Corporate Giving & Volunteers](#)
 - » [Nonprofit Secure - Safety and Security Resources for Grantee-Partners](#)
 - » [Resilia: Nonprofit Capacity Building & Coaching for Private Foundation Grantees| Funder Program](#)
 - » [Missouri Public Health Institute](#)
 - » [Build Healthy Places Network](#)
 - » [Center for Community Investment](#)
 - » [NeighborWorks America](#)
 - » [American Public Health Association \(APHA\) Public Health Funder Network](#)

Wenderoff, J. (2025, July 8). *Public Health Initiatives Deliver Big Returns on Investment*. The Pew Charitable Trusts. <https://www.pew.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2025/07/08/public-health-initiatives-deliver-big-returns-on-investment>