



Connecting the Value of Public Health to Civic Participation

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1

11:30 am – 1:00 pm ET / 8:30 – 10:00 am PT

This event will be recorded. The recording of will be available on publichealthcollaborative.org by the end of this week.

All attendees are automatically muted upon entry.

Meet Today's Experts



Gnora Mahs
Senior Advisor
Institute for Responsive Government



Ben Ruxin
Chief Executive Officer
A Healthier Democracy



Aysha Pamukcu
Policy Fund Director
San Francisco Foundation



David Heayn-Menendez
Mental Health Campaign Senior Advisor
for Communications
Children First



ASL and Closed Captioning

ASL interpretation: ASL interpretation is being provided by Keystone Interpreting Solutions, with interpreters Sage and Patty.

To activate Closed Captions: Click on the “More” button located on the Zoom toolbar and select “Show Captions.”

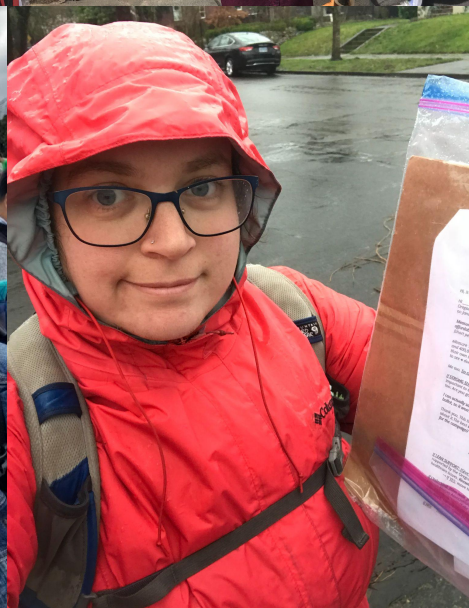
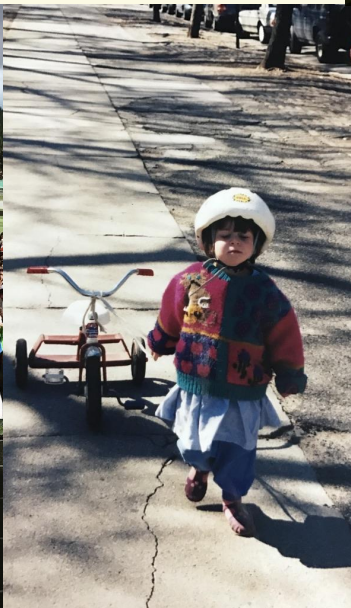
Don't Forget to Use the Chat

Ask questions in the chat or by using Zoom's Q&A or Chat function throughout the webinar.

We'll do our best to get to all your questions during today's Q&A.

How is Democracy Related to Health?

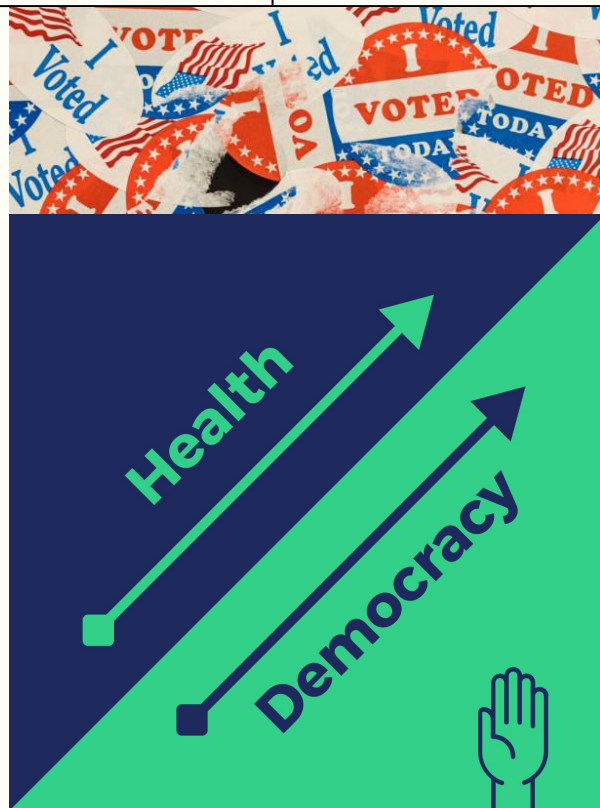
My Story



HEALTH IS ALWAYS ON THE BALLOT

HEALTH &
DEMOCRACY

- Public Safety & Violence prevention
- Health care access
- Early childhood investments
- Climate resiliency
- Pandemic & infectious disease prevention
- Maternal and Infant Health
- Reproductive Health
- Public Health Authority
- Housing, water, food, education, transportation, civil rights



2020 BROUGHT PUBLIC HEALTH & ELECTIONS TOGETHER

HEALTH &
DEMOCRACY



PUBLIC HEALTH IS...

HEALTH &
DEMOCRACY

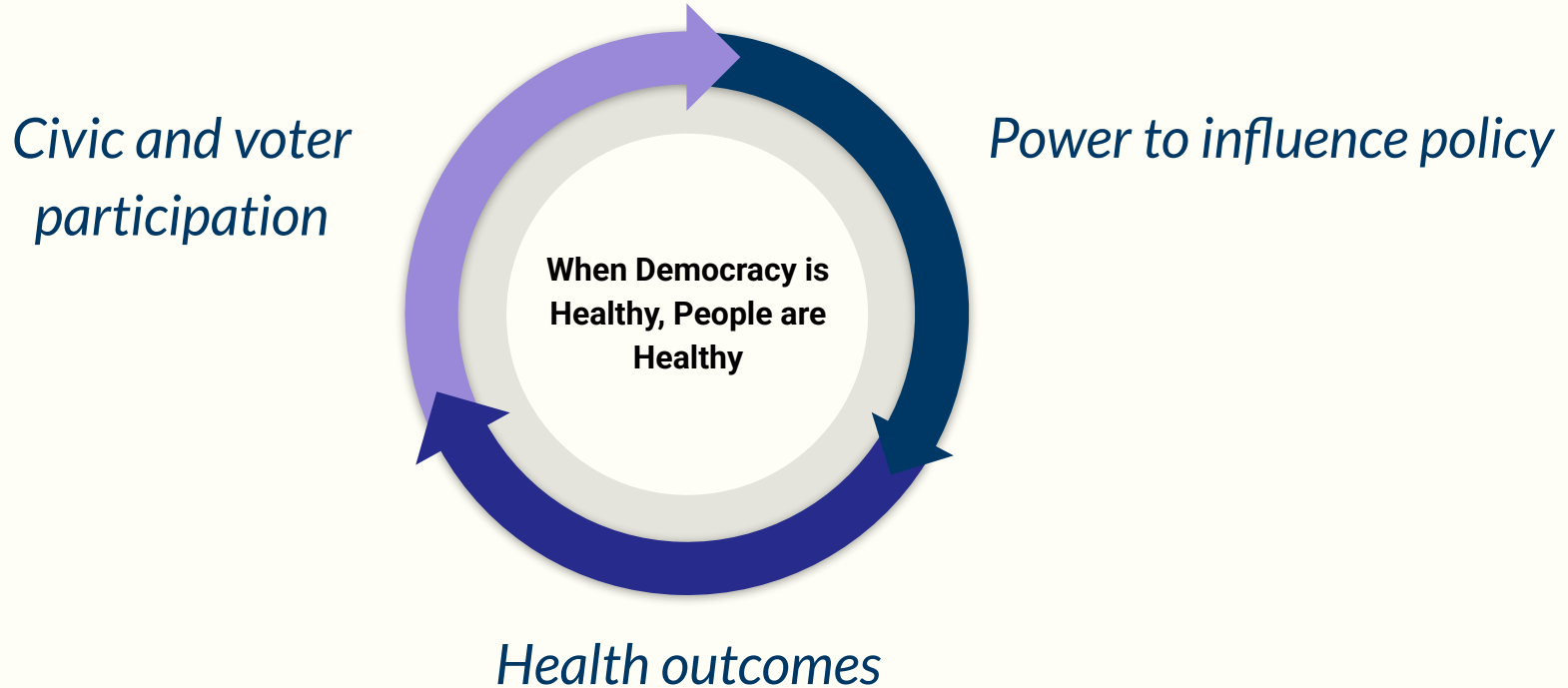
"... Public Health is what we... do
collectively to assure the
conditions in which (all) people
can be healthy"

*Institute of Medicine (1988), Future of Public
Health*



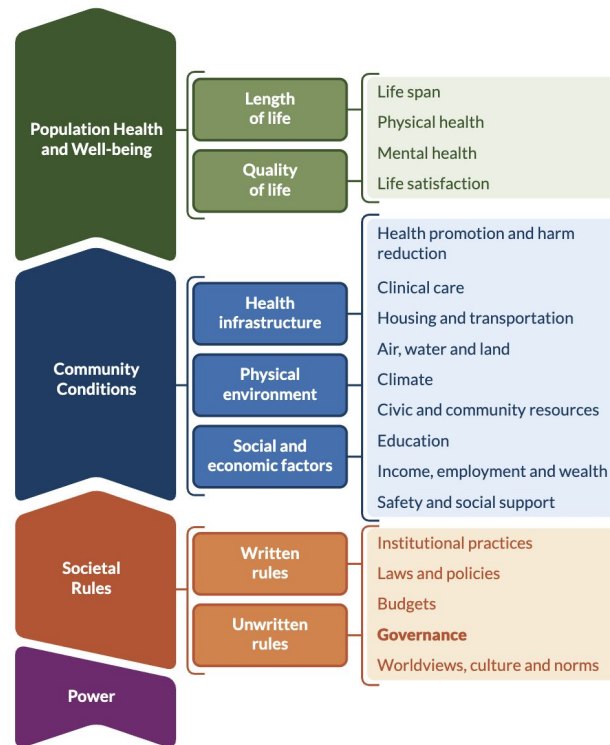
HEALTH & DEMOCRACY ARE INTERDEPENDENT

HEALTH &
DEMOCRACY



HEALTH & DEMOCRACY ARE INTERDEPENDENT

HEALTH & DEMOCRACY



University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute Model of Health © 2025

HISTORY: ELECTORAL EXPANSION IMPROVES HEALTH

Expansion of Voting Access	Health Improvement
Women’s Suffrage	Child mortality rates declined (Miller, 2008)
Civil Rights Movement	More inclusive policies in education, housing, economic opportunity, and health care including Medicare and Medicaid (Dawes, 2020)
Voting Rights Act of 1965	Reductions in Black infant deaths in Southern counties subject to preclearance (Rushovich et. al, 2024)

All steps forward were contested “continuous struggle for power...”

- Compares 12 public health indicators and voter turnout to the restrictiveness of voting policies in each state.
- States with more voting access and greater civic participation have better health outcomes



**Health &
Democracy
Index**

OVERALL FINDINGS:

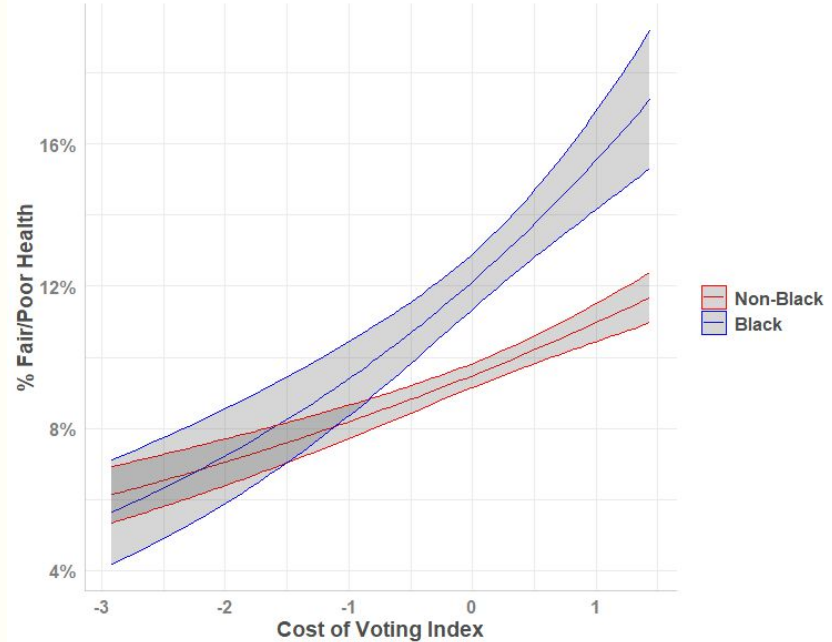
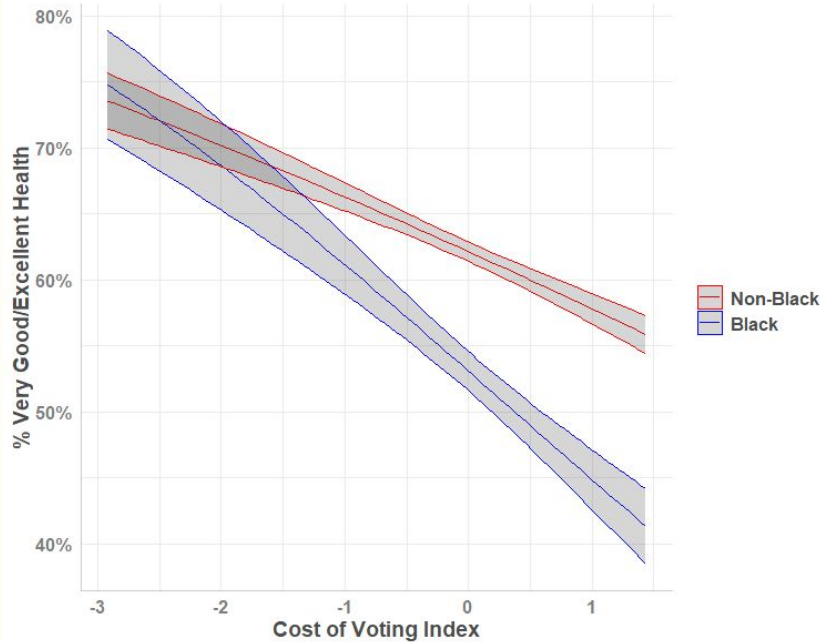
More Voting Access, Better Health Outcomes

States with more inclusive voting
policies and greater levels of civic
participation are healthier.



RESTRICTIVE POLICIES AND THE HEALTH OF BLACK AMERICANS

HEALTH &
DEMOCRACY



Schraufnagel, S., D. Hunter, R. Durbin, and G. Mahs. 2025. "Restrictive State Electoral Environments and the Health of Black Americans." *Social Science Quarterly* 106, no. 5: 106, e70077. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.70077>

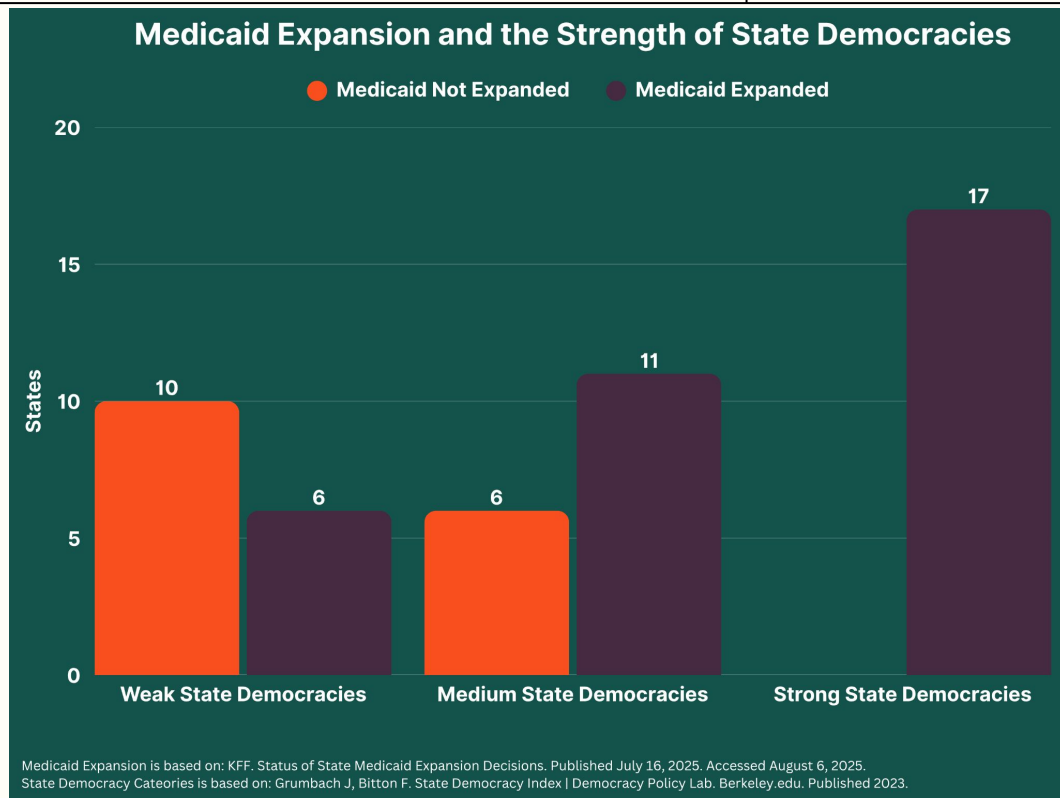
- States where it is **easier to vote** are more likely to have:
 - better rates of **state-level self-reported health** across time (1996-2020); Schraufnagle, 2023
 - **lower uninsured** rates; Pabayo et al., 2021
 - counties had **lower pre-vaccine COVID** case and mortality rates; Pabayo et al., 2022
 - Lower working age **mortality** rates; Montez et.al., 2023
- Civic engagement (voting, volunteering, and activism) among adolescents and young adults is positively associated with **better future income, education levels and mental health** compared to non-voters; Ballard et al., 2019

STRONG DEMOCRACIES SUPPORT KEY HEALTH REFORMS

HEALTH &
DEMOCRACY

States with **stronger democracies** were more likely to have **expanded Medicaid eligibility** by 2020, regardless of partisan-lean, median household income, and educational attainment.

Mahs, Gnora, and Marisa Bremer. *From Ballots to Better Health How Inclusive Democracy Shapes the Public's Health*. 2025.



What Trust Is For

Ben Ruxin

Chief Executive Officer, A Healthier Democracy
(Vot-ER and Link Health)

Institutions have lost trust. Providers have kept it.

27%

**Average trust across 14 major U.S.
institutions**

Source: Gallup

86%

**Trust their own healthcare
provider**

Source: KFF

83%

**Saw a health professional in the
past year**

Source: CDC / NCHS

What this shows: Healthcare professionals have a significant, unique opportunity for communication.

Usually those conversations stop when the medical part is done.

What people need today

Two purposes: meet the need someone has today, and shape the policies that drive health for years. Link Health focuses on the first. Vot-ER focuses on the second.

\$142B

**in federal benefits goes
unclaimed every year**

This gap exists largely because enrollment is hard to navigate, not because people do not qualify. This is a problem that will only grow in scale in 2027.

Trained Patient Navigators work on site in clinics. They connect patients to food assistance, childcare, utilities, internet access, and healthcare coverage, and they stay with the enrollment from start to finish.

30,000+

patients screened

\$5M+

in benefits secured

200+

Navigators trained

At one of our Boston partner sites, a Navigator sat down with a mother who was holding her family together through a devastating year. In a single visit she was enrolled in childcare assistance, cash assistance, and Lifeline.

Close to \$20,000 a year added to her household budget.

A voice in what comes next

60M

unregistered eligible voters in the United States

Source: U.S. Census Bureau CPS

61%

of them say they have never been asked to register

Source: Pew Charitable Trusts

A trusted person wears a badge with a QR code and adds one question during social history: “Are you registered to vote?” It is optional, nonpartisan, and adds nothing to anyone’s workload.

80,000+

healthcare professionals

2,100+

sites

89,000

registered or prepared to vote

It benefits clinicians too: In our own 2022 survey of participating clinicians (n=112), 79% reported a greater sense of agency to affect change and 50% said it helped protect against burnout.

Participation changes who gets listened to

Campaigns and candidates sort people by whether they have voted before. That sorting decides whose priorities get heard.

When people do not vote

They are labeled unlikely voters.

Campaigns stop contacting them.

Their priorities drop out of the agenda, so nothing changes, so there is even less reason to vote next time.

When they do

They are now labeled likely voters

Campaigns start contacting them.

Their priorities enter the conversation, and the loop starts running the other way.

Participation makes people and communities visible, and makes elected officials accountable their needs

What makes the ask work

How our tools work in practice.

1

**It comes from someone
they already trust**

IN PRACTICE

The question sits in the social history, right after “do you smoke” and “do you drink.” Same person, same visit, takes minimal time.

2

**The tool does the hard part,
not the messenger**

IN PRACTICE

One sentence, then point at the QR code. The page walks the person through every step, works on any phone, and has a helpline. Nobody has to learn election law to take part.

3

**It stays neutral,
and says so out loud**

IN PRACTICE

The script ends by handing the decision back. Staff can point to materials and answer questions about the form. They never name a party or a candidate.

Swap “clinician” for WIC counselor, home visitor, or public health professional and all of these conditions hold true too

The script we train 80,000 people on

Built for a 30-second encounter.

1 Opening

Ask, do not assert

"Before I go, I'd like to check whether you're registered to vote at your current address."

Start with a question about the person in front of you.

2 Dialogue

Start from what they already care about, and keep it local

"Your vote is a powerful tool to address issues you care about, like your health. Local elections are often decided by a small number of voters, and the impact on your community is immediate."

Their concerns are the anchor.

3 Take Action

One small step, from a neutral source

"Point your camera at this QR code. It walks you through every step, and there's a helpline if you have questions."

Keep the ask brief.

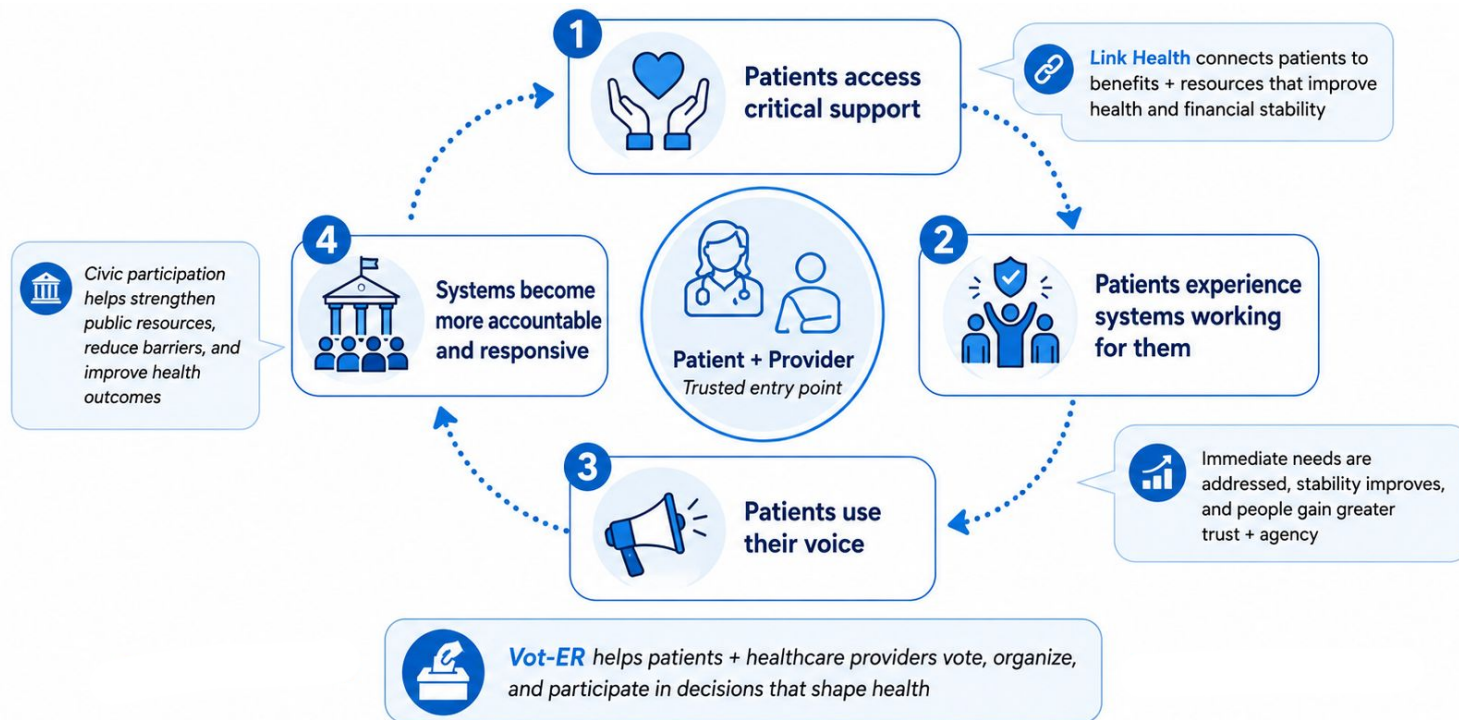
The importance of nonpartisanship

“I want to make sure you have all the information you need to make a decision for yourself.”

The script never tells anyone how to vote. It ends by handing the decision back to the individual.

Nonpartisanship maintains the deep trust between a trusted messenger and the person in front of them.

The virtuous cycle



START WITH YOURSELF

Check your own registration

Point your camera at the code and check that you are registered at your current address.

It takes about ninety seconds.

Physicians vote at lower rates than the general public, so this is not only a question for patients.



vot-er.org/act

Scan it, or type it in

TAKE THE NEXT STEP

How to go deeper with us

Anyone

Order a free badge and materials.

vot-er.org/badge

Organizations

Join as a partner and get your own branded landing page.

vot-er.org/join

Sites serving patients

Bring benefits navigation on site through Link Health (MA and TX currently).

link-health.org



Civic health is public health

Bridging communication and community
power

Aysha Pamukcu | For the Public Health Communications Collaborative, October 2026

What do we mean by public health?



From “Advancing Equity and Justice” (APHA Press, 2025)

The Four Commitments of Public Health

PREVENTION

Stopping problems before they exist

SCALE

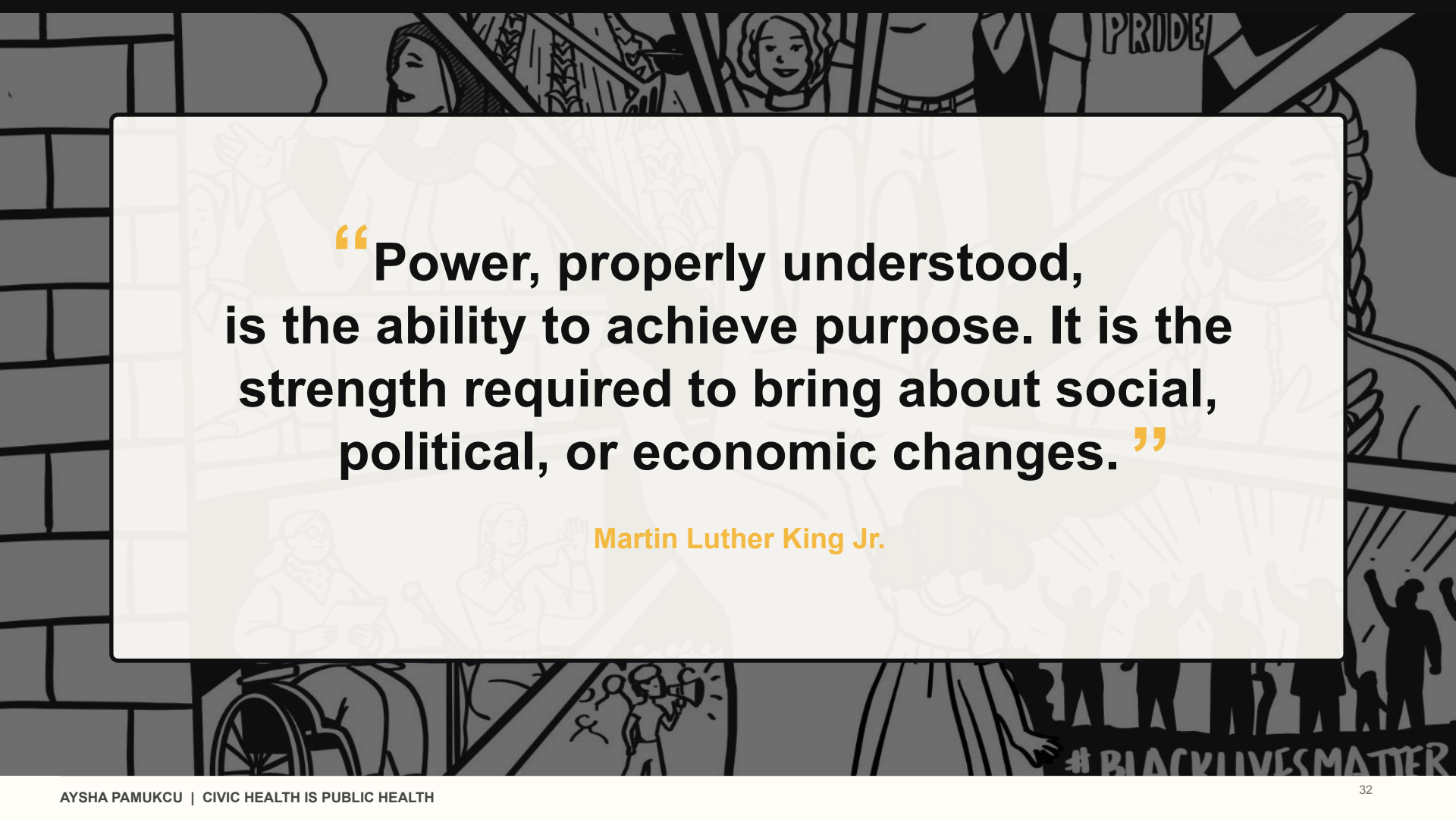
Promoting collective flourishing

ROOT CAUSES

Addressing the systems behind the symptoms

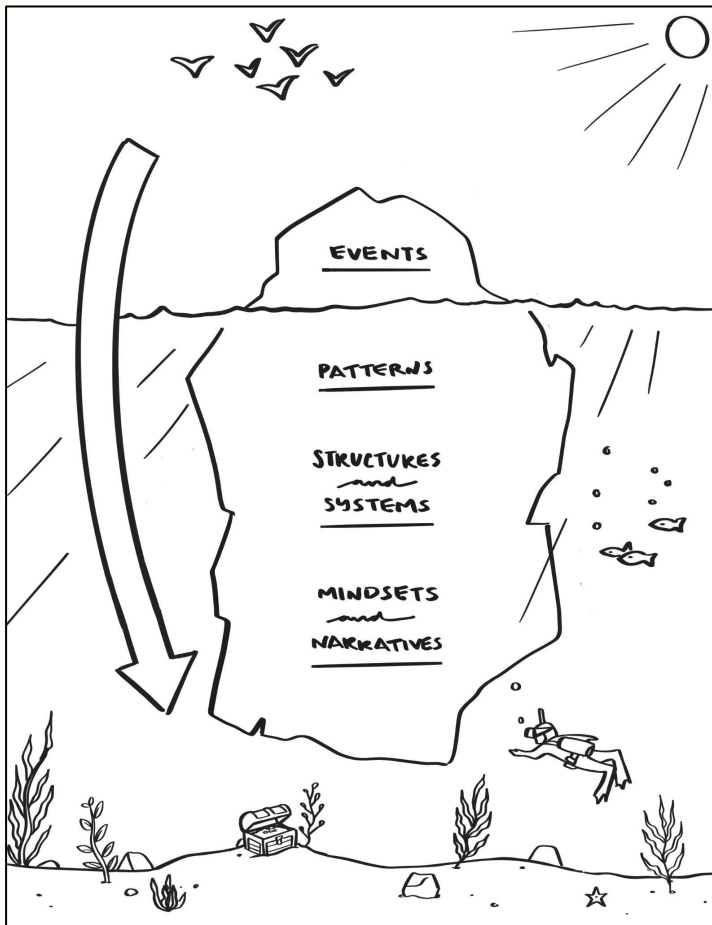
JUSTICE

Building power for lasting change



**“Power, properly understood,
is the ability to achieve purpose. It is the
strength required to bring about social,
political, or economic changes.”**

Martin Luther King Jr.



To shift power, shift misleading mindsets

Health is shaped by what sits below the surface

EVENTS

What is happening?

PATTERNS

What keeps happening?

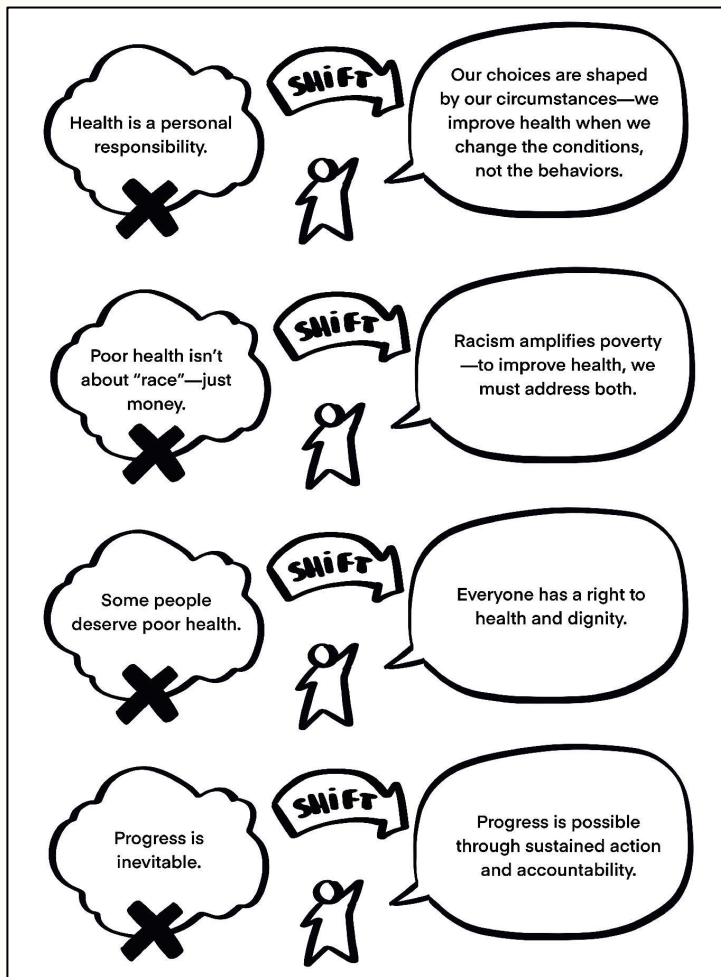
STRUCTURES

What structures & systems drive these patterns? How are they interacting to maintain the status quo?

MINDSETS & NARRATIVES

What worldviews and stories shape the systems and structures?

From "Advancing Equity and Justice" (APHA Press, 2025). Artist credit: Jasmin Pamukcu.



Naming power & systems

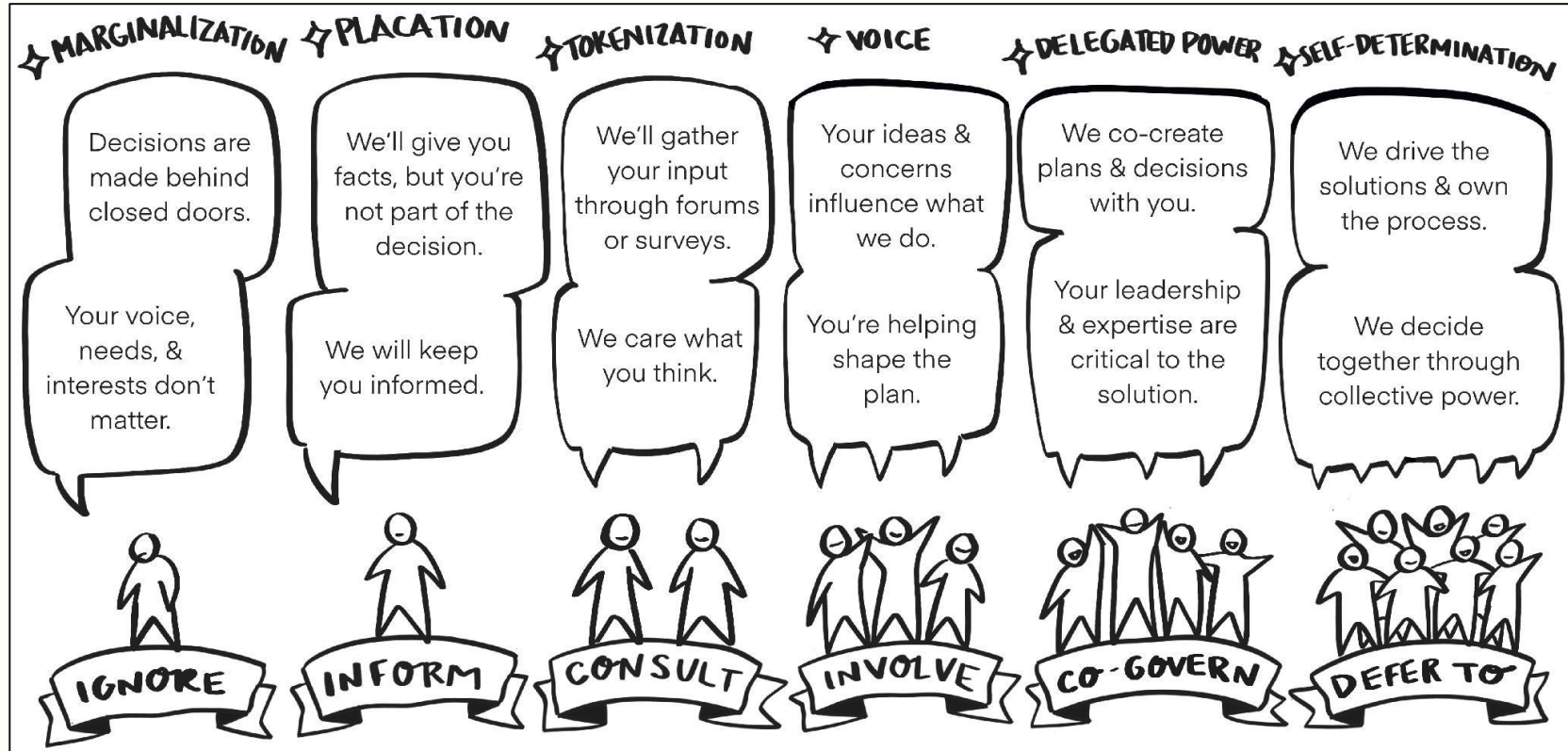
This shifts us from individual responsibility to shared conditions

Going deeper with our questions

- Who defines the problem?
- Does the mindset name or hide power?
- What solutions are implied?
- Can civic participation alter the outcome?

From "Advancing Equity and Justice" (APHA Press, 2025). Artist credit: Jasmin Pamukcu.

Who has power? And are we communicating honestly about it?



From "Advancing Equity and Justice" (APHA Press, 2025). Adapted with permission from Rosa González. Artist credit: Jasmin Pamukcu.

Communication cannot substitute for participation

But communicators can help shift the center of gravity toward community leadership.

1

MAKE POWER VISIBLE

Explain who sets the agenda, who decides, and what is open to influence.

2

INVITE HONESTLY

Match the invitation to the actual authority, resources, and choices offered.

3

CLOSE THE LOOP

Share what was heard, what changed, what did not change, and why.

4

CENTER COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Support people to tell their own stories and shape the narrative.



Healthy communities depend on civic participation and power

Communicators (and that's all of us!) can
name power to help shift it

Strong Minds,
Bright Futures

A Partnership for Child
Mental Wellbeing

PHCC WEBINAR

From Daily Experience to Public Decisions

How public health communicators
connect community experience to
health and civic participation

David Heayn-Menendez

Children First | Strong Minds, Bright
Futures

October 1, 2026



**A health issue becomes civic
when the public decision is
visible.**

Three settings, one civic problem

A sidewalk, vaccine outreach, and youth mental health all raise the same public question.

01 LOCAL GOVERNMENT

White Pine Alley

Accessibility, stormwater,
neighborhood use

02 COMMUNITY HEALTH OUTREACH

MENA COVID response

Trust, language, vaccine access

03 STATEWIDE ADVOCACY

Strong Minds

Youth experience, public will,
policy decisions

People feel the impact. Public health communicators make the decision path visible.

What people need to see

Each example follows the same path from daily experience to public decision



A health experience becomes civic when the decision path is visible

White Pine Alley: accessibility, stormwater, and trust

The accessibility goal was clear. Public participation helped improve how the Borough pursued it.



OPTION CONSIDERED
Close the alley



DIRECTION ULTIMATELY BUILT
Keep alley access open

The public was not asked to approve accessibility. Residents helped shape the design, access, drainage, and tree decisions.

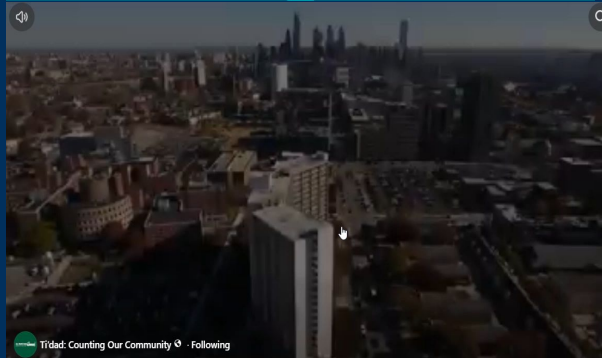
MENA COVID outreach: trust and access carried the message



Community-specific data were limited

Arabic-speaking partners shaped the message and its delivery

Vaccines and civic resources appeared in trusted community settings



Translation mattered. Trust and access made the message work.

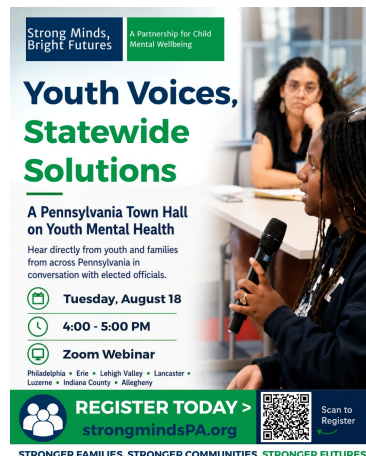
Strong Minds: shared concern must reach a decision

“Adults tell young people to ask for help. What happens after they do?”

Across our dialogues, people agreed that children need help.

Shared concern has not yet produced enough action on funding, workforce, access, and responsibility.

Communication must make the unfinished decisions visible.



Strong Minds, Bright Futures
A Partnership for Child Mental Wellbeing

Youth Voices, Statewide Solutions

A Pennsylvania Town Hall on Youth Mental Health
Hear directly from youth and families from across Pennsylvania in conversation with elected officials.

Tuesday, August 18
4:00 - 5:00 PM

Zoom Webinar
Philadelphia • Erie • Lehigh Valley • Lancaster • Luzerne • Indiana County • Allegheny

REGISTER TODAY >
strongmindsPA.org

STRONGER FAMILIES. STRONGER COMMUNITIES. STRONGER FUTURES.



Join us. Take the next step
Strong Minds, Bright Futures
A Partnership for Child Mental Wellbeing

IGNITE PHILLY:

Driving the Next Phase of Youth Mental Health

Students. Families. Educators. Community leaders.
Join the conversation shaping what comes next

School District of Philadelphia HQ
440 N Broad Street, Philadelphia

Monday, March 16, 2026
4:00pm - 6:00PM

TO LEARN MORE, VISIT [STRONGMINDSPA.ORG](https://strongmindsPA.org)

REGISTER HERE IN ADVANCE.



Listening becomes civic participation when shared concern reaches an accountable public decision

Three messages for public action

3

messages
for public
action

01

Decision map

This experience is shaped by [decision], made by [body], on [timeline].

02

Invitation with a job

At [forum], share [specific experience] because it can inform [decision].

03

Public receipt

We heard [theme]. [Action] changed. [Constraint] remains. Next: [date or body].

Role clarity matters: name who controls the decision and what each partner can honestly promise.

Health belongs at the center of civic life

Voting helps determine who holds public authority.
Participation between elections helps shape how that authority is used.

DAILY
EXPERIENCE

PUBLIC DECISION

REAL ENTRY
POINT

PUBLIC RECEIPT

David Heayn-Menendez

Strong Minds,
Bright Futures

A Partnership for Child
Mental Wellbeing

Get Out the Vote Graphics

New customizable content from PHCC to share before Election Day



Content, Instructions, and Suggested Captions



Thank You!

More Resources

PublicHealthCollaborative.org

Email

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