

# The Foundation Review

---

Volume 12

Issue 3 *Postsecondary Education Attainment -- Free Access*

---

9-2020

## Advancing Social Determinants of Health Through Investments in Postsecondary Attainment and Sustaining Employment

Melissa B. Eggen

*University of Louisville*

J'Aime C. Jennings

*University of Louisville*

Molly O'Keefe

*Harvard Law School*

Brandy N. Kelly Pryor

*Humana Foundation*

Leslie Clements

*Humana Foundation*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/tfr>

 Part of the [Nonprofit Administration and Management Commons](#), [Public Administration Commons](#), [Public Affairs Commons](#), and the [Public Policy Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Eggen, M. B., Jennings, J. C., O'Keefe, M., Kelly Pryor, B. N., & Clements, L. (2020). Advancing Social Determinants of Health Through Investments in Postsecondary Attainment and Sustaining Employment. *The Foundation Review*, 12(3). <https://doi.org/10.9707/1944-5660.1528>

# Advancing Social Determinants of Health Through Investments in Postsecondary Attainment and Sustaining Employment

*Melissa B. Eggen, M.P.H., J'Aime C. Jennings, Ph.D., and Molly O'Keefe, M.S.H.A., University of Louisville; and Brandy N. Kelly Pryor, Ph.D., and Leslie Clements, M.S., Humana Foundation*

**Keywords:** *Social determinants, health equity, postsecondary success, employment*

## Introduction

The Humana Foundation, Humana Inc.'s philanthropic arm, is a corporate foundation with a strategic geographic focus on the southeastern region of the United States. Since 1981 the foundation has supported many areas, including domestic and international health, the arts, and civic and cultural development. In 2015 Humana Inc. announced its Bold Goal initiative, a population health strategy to improve the health of communities by 20% as measured by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Healthy Days measurement.

In 2018, the foundation announced an alignment with Humana Inc.'s Bold Goal initiative, deepening its geographic focus and significantly shifting to address social determinants of health more intentionally with a key aim of promoting health equity. The foundation's investments are currently focused in eight of Humana's Bold Goal communities: Baton Rouge and New Orleans, Louisiana; Louisville, Kentucky; Broward County, Tampa, and Jacksonville, Florida; San Antonio, Texas; and Knoxville, Tennessee.

The foundation has four key portfolios — the Strategic Community Investment Program (SCIP), the Community Partners Program, the Humana employee programs, and disaster philanthropy. In 2019, the foundation awarded \$12.4 million to more than 30 organizations in Bold Goal communities across all four portfolios. The focus of this article, the SCIP, seeks to advance health equity by addressing key social determinants of health. In 2019, the foundation invested \$7.6 million in 12 organizations

## Key Points

- In 2018, the Humana Foundation shifted the focus of its work to the social determinants of health, with the key aim of promoting health equity. With this new focus came a recognition that larger, long-term investments would be needed to support strategies addressing upstream determinants of health. The foundation also recognized the need to co-create processes with communities to understand how to provide essential holistic supports.
- This article explores one area of the foundation's new efforts, the Strategic Community Investment Program, which focuses in part on postsecondary attainment and sustaining employment. The foundation partnered with the University of Louisville's Center for Health Organization Transformation to systematically review models in the literature of successful postsecondary attainment strategies to evaluate the results in communities.
- This article shares key learnings from the literature and coordinated practice in communities that were used to revise the foundation's strategy, and concludes with suggestions for other foundations interested in addressing postsecondary attainment and other social determinants of health to better meet the challenges and opportunities of the communities they serve.

to support programs within the SCIP portfolio. These funds, ranging from annual amounts of \$400,000 to \$1 million per organization, were

**FIGURE 1** Strategic Community Investment Areas

distributed across four key social determinants of health — food security, financial asset security, social connectedness, and postsecondary attainment and sustaining employment. (See Figure 1.) The grants specific to postsecondary attainment and sustaining employment, which occurred in Year 2 of the foundation's investments and are discussed in this article, are located in Jacksonville, Louisville, Baton Rouge, and New Orleans. The foundation's intent is to direct investment dollars to the most marginalized demographic and geographic populations, particularly people of color and communities with high concentrations of poverty.

### A New Approach to Grantmaking

The Humana Foundation recognized that a commitment to the social determinants of health and achieving health equity would require a more strategic approach to grantmaking. In 2018, it announced new staffing, including a director of programs, that would focus on research and strategy; larger, longer-term grants (up to three years) within specific areas of social determinants of health; and a goal of partnering more closely with communities to better understand how to leverage the foundation's social, moral, intellectual, reputational, and financial (SMIRF) capital to achieve health equity. Foundation board leadership also made the decision to focus resources on addressing systemic and cultural influences, on strategic areas where greater impact could be achieved, and where there was already momentum in the communities served.

In late 2019, a year into the launch of the new strategy, the foundation evaluated the messaging and framing of the expected results of the work. Staff began to hone the approach by developing a common narrative needed for staff and leadership to align expectations about the length of time required to see impacts in systems-level work. To ensure common definitions and language internally and externally, the foundation developed a set of recurring takeaways. A few of the guiding takeaways that staff, board, and partners use to guide their work around the vision of health equity include:

1. *Health is local and specific.* Health is more than health care. The choices we make are driven by our environment and the choices we have in that environment. Culture must be considered in the design and implementation of strategy and we must use a lens of historical context to guide our work.
2. *We are focused on whole person and whole community health.* We seek to understand the underlying impacts of health. We can make the greatest impact by starting in one's life as early as possible.
3. *Change takes time.* We must build, grow, and sustain relationships and investments over time.
4. *Collecting data and assessing impact takes time.* It requires building capacity and the allocation of resources (e.g., human,

**TABLE 1** The Humana Foundation Portfolios of Work

| Portfolio Area  | Program Description   |
|---|---|
| <b>Strategic Community Investments Program (SCIP)</b> | Large investment dollars to organizations in the eight Bold Goal communities  |
| <b>Community Partners Program</b>                     | Smaller investments in organizations based in Louisville, Kentucky, Humana Inc.'s headquarters, that are working to improve the quality of life and place |
| <b>Disaster Philanthropy</b>                          | Support for efforts that help people prepare, recover, and rebuild their lives, health, and well-being before, during, and after a disaster               |
| <b>Humana Employee Programs</b>                       | Support that allows Humana employees to engage in charitable giving and volunteerism, and that provides a scholarship fund for children of employees      |

financial, trust, technology). Data must be disaggregated to understand inequities. We must use learnings to inform our investment strategies. Additionally, the changes that happen across multiple generations is critical to assess when understanding the interpersonal changes in a community.

5. *Relationships drive results.* Networks of multisector partners are needed for large-scale change. We will partner with other funders to pool our resources for greater impact.

These recurring takeaways continue to be refined and integrated into the overall strategy as the foundation and its partners experience what it takes to invest in health equity.

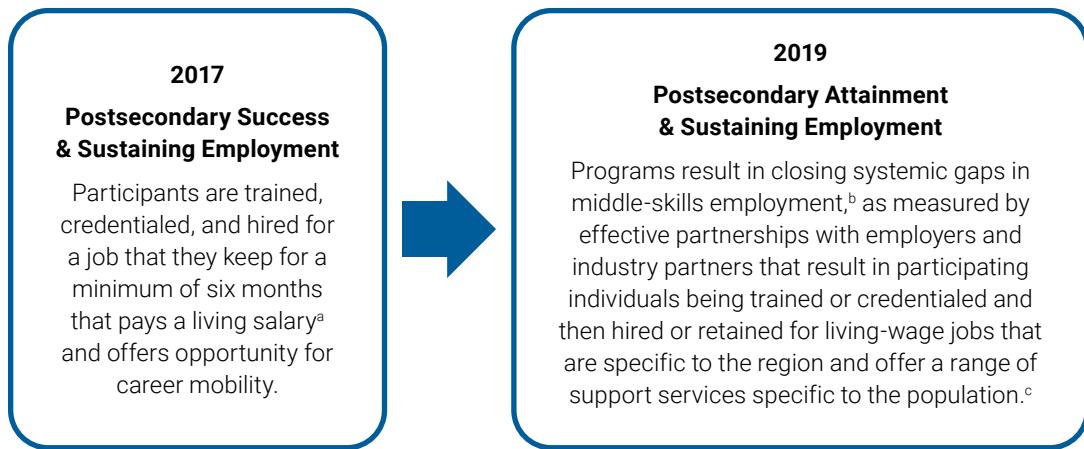
At the root of each of the Humana Foundation's four portfolios of work is its investment in research to advance health equity by better understanding social determinants of health, in all their complexity and interconnectedness. (See Table 1.) Some of these portfolios reflect long-term investments areas for the foundation, including disaster philanthropy and Humana employee programs. Others were newly defined in 2018 in alignment with the Bold Goal initiative, including the SCIP. This article highlights the postsecondary attainment and sustaining employment work that is housed within SCIP,

where much of the newly adopted investment strategies have been implemented.

### Postsecondary Attainment as a Social Determinant of Health

Automation, globalization, and related forces have led to major changes in the U.S. economy, shifting the workforce toward skilled services such as health care, finance, and information technology. In the competitive environment created by these forces, employers demand a broader, more complex skill set from employees, especially the ability to utilize ever-improving technology (Carnevale, Strohl, Ridley, & Gulish, 2018; Carnevale, Rose & Cheah, 2011; Holzer, 2008). Two-thirds of all jobs now require some education beyond high school, and while a bachelor's degree remains the surest path to obtaining a high-paying job, ample opportunity remains for middle-skill workers who obtain associate degrees, certificates, and licenses beyond a high school diploma (Carnevale et al., 2018). Workers who lack opportunity to access further education are often restricted to low-skill, low-paying jobs (Holzer).

Socioeconomic status (SES) — measured by education, income, and occupation (Berzofsky, Smiley-McDonald, Moore, & Krebs, 2014) — underlies three major determinants of health: health care, environmental exposure, and health behavior (Adler & Newman, 2002). Low-SES

**FIGURE 2** Evolution of Understanding Postsecondary Attainment

<sup>a</sup>Living salary refers to a salary that is high enough to maintain a normal standard of living.

<sup>b</sup>Systemic gaps are those that exist for groups or populations in which the systems or structural mechanisms are interactive rather than singular in nature (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2017).

<sup>c</sup>Job-training programs need to be tailored to both the region and target population (Campbell et al., 2008; Ray, Galvan, & Zarestky, 2018; Schnur, Warland, Young, & Zralek, 2013).

Americans are more likely to experience higher rates of heart disease, diabetes, stroke, chronic stress, low birthweight, arthritis, and cancer; more likely to engage in negative health behaviors; and less likely to have access to health care services (Adler & Newman; Khullar & Chokshi, 2018). Opening pathways for low-income workers to earn higher wages in more skilled positions has the potential to increase not only household income, but also household health status. Evidence indicates education and training beyond a high school degree is a reliable pathway to obtaining a median-income job. (Carnevale et al., 2018).

### The Beginnings and Evolution of Postsecondary Attainment

Recognizing that overall physical and mental health are intimately connected with economic well-being and opportunity, the Humana Foundation selected postsecondary attainment as one of its focus areas. In 2017, after a scan of available data in Louisville, foundation leadership determined that an investment in postsecondary attainment in the region had the potential to move the needle on health equity. For nearly 15 years, there has been a strong

history in Louisville of research and data gathering about health outcomes from such resources as Louisville's Center for Health Equity (2017) and the Greater Louisville Project. These local government and communitywide efforts have identified well-defined gaps in postsecondary attainment as a barrier to equity.

Further defining its approach to postsecondary attainment, the foundation worked with a consultant to create a very specific results statement around what it wanted to achieve through this portfolio of work. Understanding that job mobility and income are closely linked to overall health status, the results statement was focused on individuals being trained, credentialed, and hired for a job that they kept for a minimum of six months, paid a living wage, and offered opportunity for career mobility (Weidrich, Rice, Sims, & Weisman, 2017).

In 2018, the foundation released a Request for Proposals (RFP) to all eight Bold Goal communities with the opportunity for communities to focus on food and social isolation and, in Louisville only, an opportunity to focus on postsecondary attainment and financial asset

security. The foundation's initial investment in postsecondary attainment was restricted to Louisville largely due to the availability of local data that informed its understanding of opportunities and challenges in the region. Through a series of listening tours in the Bold Goal communities, however, the foundation learned from grantees and community stakeholders that there was a need and capacity in other geographies to work on postsecondary attainment. This led the foundation to open the RFP for postsecondary attainment to all Bold Goal communities in 2019 and subsequently invest in programs in Baton Rouge, New Orleans, and Jacksonville.

The initial focus of postsecondary attainment has evolved as the foundation and its partners have engaged in the work itself. (See Figure 2.) The current emphases of the foundation's work in postsecondary attainment are:

- closing systemic gaps in middle-skills employment (Carnevale et al., 2018);
- training, credentialing, hiring, and retaining individuals for living-wage jobs (Weidrich et al., 2017); and
- partnering with employers and industry partners to build effective collaborations that support individuals seeking out and obtaining middle-skills jobs (Jain, Newman, & Montes, 2017).

This revised strategy is the result of one year of learning and exploration both internally and alongside partners. First, foundation staff realized after considering initial responses that the request of partners to focus on only one select determinant of health was not aligned with the interconnected nature of the social determinants of health. In 2019, the foundation revised the RFP to allow partners to focus on multiple determinants. Second, the foundation was interested in a deeper understanding of its postsecondary attainment work and formed a partnership with the University of Louisville's Center for Health Organization Transformation (CHOT) to conduct a scan of the research literature and examine models of success for postsecondary attainment.

*The Humana Foundation is committed to using an evidence-based approach in its work and made a key strategic decision to concentrate its postsecondary attainment strategy on building a training and credentialing pipeline to middle-income jobs.*

Finally, the foundation conducted focus groups and informal discussions with grantees and key community stakeholders across all Bold Goal communities to better understand opportunities for each of the funding areas, including postsecondary attainment. It is important to note that engaging with grantees and key stakeholders to inform strategies and investments represents a significant evolution for the foundation in terms of partnering with the community. This marks an intentional strategic shift that is critical to its interest in understanding and addressing social determinants of health. The foundation recognizes that without elevating community voice and investing in community-driven solutions, the challenges of working on social determinants of health would be impossible.

### Cultivating Key Learnings for Strategic Guidance

The Humana Foundation is committed to using an evidence-based approach in its work and made a key strategic decision to concentrate its postsecondary attainment strategy on building a training and credentialing pipeline to middle-income jobs. As such, it was interested in conducting a comprehensive exploration to further inform its efforts. The University of Louisville's CHOT was contracted in early 2019 to complete a literature review to identify evidence-based strategies for postsecondary attainment. The foundation found value in

partnering with CHOT as it provided a set of key learnings from the literature and time with the CHOT research team to reflect on those learnings, an activity that many taxed foundation staff do not have time to engage in effectively. Other foundations may find value in working with university partners to make space for this type of reflection and to condense a large body of research into attainable and practical applications for work in social determinants.

The primary purpose of the CHOT literature review was to explore interventions and key elements related to successful job training and placement for low-income individuals, the intended target population for the foundation's work in postsecondary attainment. The following research question was developed to guide the literature review: "What kind of job training programs increase job access at a livable wage for asset-limited, income-constrained families or individuals?" An initial scan of the literature revealed two streams of research: postsecondary success and job-training programs. These areas were shown to have little overlap and, although they share some characteristics, they have very different mechanisms and protocols to achievement. For example:

- Postsecondary programs tend to emphasize college readiness, degree completion, financial and academic assistance, and transition to college. In contrast, job-training programs focus on entry-level positions, on-site training, career counseling, work readiness, certification, and subsidized employment.
- Postsecondary programs are generally aimed at the college/university or state level, while job-training programs seem to be more community-based and specific.

Based upon these findings, the CHOT team recommended that the foundation focus more holistically on job-training programs as opposed to academic readiness and degree completion, concluding that this area of work could be more readily influenced at the community-level through grantmaking. This is an important distinction from postsecondary attainment

programs that emphasize degree completion by, for instance, providing scholarships to students needing financial support or increasing recruitment and retention of traditionally underrepresented students. While postsecondary education completion is one important element in advancing individuals up the income ladder and providing additional opportunities for job mobility, it is not the only necessary approach.

First, not everyone is interested in attending college, nor do all jobs at the middle-income level require a college degree. Many individuals who are in the workforce may not be interested in returning to school, though they may be interested in a job-training program that can support skill building and job advancement. Second, many communities, particularly in rural areas, do not have abundant job opportunities for those with postsecondary degrees. Instead, many employers in these communities seek out individuals with skills that can be learned in an apprenticeship or job-training program. Finally, ensuring that students entering college, particularly those from underrepresented populations such as communities of color and first-generation college students, have access to the necessary supports to help them complete a degree program requires a significant investment of human and financial capital that is not possible with the investment of a single foundation. The Humana Foundation's decision to invest in job-training programs was made with the consideration of how it could best utilize and leverage its investments in the communities it serves.

In conducting the literature review, the CHOT research team distilled key learnings that the foundation might consider as it refines its strategy for postsecondary attainment with an emphasis on job training. The key learnings of the literature review are described below, including highlights from some of the grants funded within the postsecondary attainment strategy. Where possible, there are shared examples of key learnings in action. It is important to note, however, that this work is still in a nascent stage and many of the key learnings continue to be integrated into the overall strategy.

## Key Learnings

### *Learning 1: Engage Multiple Stakeholders in the Work*

The literature review suggested that successful postsecondary attainment programs foster collaboration with multiple stakeholders, including local industry, employers, and community colleges (Maguire, Freely, Clymer, Conway, & Schwartz, 2010; Roder & Elliott, 2019). These programs are more likely to be successful because they begin by assessing economic opportunity and then work to train and match participants with the skills local employers identify as necessary. Organizations doing credentialing and training must be aware of the workforce needs of local employers so they can tailor their specific programs to meet employer demand. A strong relationship between employers and training and credentialing organizations can also enable job placement for individuals once they complete their educational or training program.

One foundation investment partner, for example, is actively identifying government partnerships and developing relationships with local labor unions to build stronger pipelines and apprenticeship programs for those who need credentialing for jobs. The process this investor has undertaken to build out its partnership models with employers, unions, educational institutions, and government agencies has created a model for the foundation to consider in future work.

In addition, employers who require four-year degrees for middle-skills positions, a practice that disproportionately affects populations with lower college graduation rates, could benefit from partnership opportunities to expand their thinking around what constitutes a qualified candidate. Another foundation grantee has increased the amount of contact it has with its community partners so it can better understand job training and placement data in the local context.

At the foundation level, there are growing expectations that grantees bring multisector constituents to the table, including those who are facing challenges obtaining middle-skills employment. The foundation's evolution has

*The literature review suggested that successful postsecondary attainment programs foster collaboration with multiple stakeholders, including local industry, employers, and community colleges.*

brought to bear that systemic solutions cannot be created without the voices of lived experience. While it was not necessarily the case in the past, the foundation has been moving toward a framework where the key stakeholder is "community."

In being accountable to its own expectations for grantees, the foundation is exploring opportunities to engage with employers and other key stakeholders in the postsecondary attainment space. One thought is that a learning community could be convened at regular times throughout the year, both virtually and in person, to share learnings and strategize. The learning community would bring together community-based organizations working toward postsecondary attainment with employer and industry partners who provide middle-skills job opportunities. It is important to note that foundation staff currently play an active role in connecting grantees and community partners around shared learnings that are surfaced in conversations and grantee learning reports. The development of a community-driven learning community, however, could catalyze the foundation's investment in social determinants by bringing innovative solutions to the table that are developed by and for the community. The University of Louisville's CHOT is working with the foundation to develop a new strategy to bring its partners together within this type of learning community to identify systemic solutions to address postsecondary attainment.

### *Learning 2: Provide Wraparound Supports*

Postsecondary attainment and sustaining employment requires attention to the

***Postsecondary attainment and sustaining employment requires attention to the interconnected factors that impact successful employment, and must include an assessment of and solutions to the underlying factors that have prevented individuals from improving their economic status in the past.***

interconnected factors that impact successful employment, and must include an assessment of and solutions to the underlying factors that have prevented individuals from improving their economic status in the past. Access to wraparound services such as transportation, housing, healthy foods, and child care is key to ensuring individuals have the necessary supports to not only complete postsecondary opportunities, but also to enter and sustain employment (Hall, 2015). For example, one foundation grantee provides programming that encourages and supports participants of all ages with an emphasis on single parents and their children and on foster care alumni. Although this organization is not focused on postsecondary training directly, it provides essential wraparound supports to individuals engaging in postsecondary education and/or training opportunities.

Each of the foundation partners that focuses on postsecondary success believes that education changes lives, families, and communities. By providing support services that address issues that may be barriers to academic and personal success — housing, child care, and food security resources — organizations are able to assist participants with meeting their educational goals. While still too early to share data around the long-term impact of these supports on engaging and sustaining employment in middle-skills

jobs, this has informed the foundation's thinking around more holistic models to help individuals succeed in their postsecondary goals.

An additional support that has surfaced as being important to address in the future is mental health; many individuals with whom foundation grantees work struggle with depression and anxiety, which may be barriers to postsecondary attainment and employment. One grantee has implemented a trauma-informed approach to supporting individuals in developing and implementing a life plan that includes career goals.

It is important that wraparound supports be provided to individuals even after they secure employment to ensure they are successful in retaining the job. Employers, particularly in Louisville, report high attrition rates for new employees within the first 30 days due to issues related to transportation and caregiving (both child care and elder care). This is an area where multistakeholder collaboration could be beneficial by partnering in a learning community that develops and tests new solutions to address these challenges.

***Learning 3: There Must Be an Equity Focus***

In Year 2 of the SCIP portfolio, organizations were asked to have a greater emphasis on systems-level approaches, shifting focus from the individual gain among people helped to, instead, considering how to impact larger systemic and structural issues. Further, in its application process, the foundation began asking organizations to define and identify their efforts around equity.

Responses to these questions help the foundation better assess organizational readiness to engage in equity efforts and also help to identify potential gaps in the field and greater opportunity for multisector partnerships. Each of the postsecondary attainment partners focuses their efforts on zip codes where there are high concentrations of poverty and primarily marginalized populations; people of color have been disproportionately affected by lack of education and economic opportunities. Closing the postsecondary attainment gap in these populations is therefore necessary to address systemic gaps in

middle-skills employment and close large gaps in overall postsecondary attainment and success (Katz, Poo, & Waxman, 2018). The foundation recognizes that each of its partners is different and encourages them to focus on equity in the context of their own communities. This explicit focus on equity is a foundational step in closing systemic gaps in postsecondary attainment.

While the foundation continues to highlight equity efforts externally, there are also ongoing internal efforts to ensure application processes and decision points within the foundation are more equitable and that investment dollars are truly reaching marginalized populations. In one case, foundation staff invited community partners in New Orleans to weigh in on the development of an RFP for the foundation's Community Partners Program. It hopes to utilize similar approaches in the postsecondary attainment work as it matures and more partnerships are built.

In terms of further strategic approaches to postsecondary attainment, there are many promising practices that can accelerate the foundation's work; this includes influencing local policy, which the foundation has not yet incorporated into its strategy. Katz et al. (2018) suggests, for example, supporting the earned income tax credit to individuals with no dependents and piloting and scaling models with portable benefits (e.g., health insurance and retirement) for workers. These are strategies that the Humana Foundation can consider in future strategic refreshes, particularly as it continues to explore new and effective approaches to address health equity (Katz et al.). However, recalling that the foundation is very early in its postsecondary attainment work, the development of this strategy continues to be a learning journey for the board and staff. Moreover, there is much to be considered and included at all levels, both internally and externally.

#### *Learning 4: Invest in Evaluation and Data Capacity*

The Humana Foundation has a goal of intentionality in designing evaluation to inform strategy. It is currently reviewing its overall evaluation

*The Humana Foundation has a goal of intentionality in designing evaluation to inform strategy. It is currently reviewing its overall evaluation framework to better collect meaningful impacts of the work it is funding.*

framework to better collect meaningful impacts of the work it is funding. The foundation is also realizing the importance of funding its partners in this same pursuit. Data and evaluation capacity can increase an organization's understanding of the population it serves, allowing it to better develop strategies to meet the needs of local employers and individuals seeking postsecondary opportunities. It can also support an organization's ability to be nimbler in adapting strategies to meet the needs of the population.

The foundation's investments in organizations have allowed for increased data collection and analysis capacity, for example. One grantee reported that 76 individuals participating in its job-training program had achieved their individual postsecondary goal of being hired into a living-wage job. In alignment with the literature, the foundation and the grantee anticipate that these individuals' sustained employment will subsequently improve their outcomes among other secondary determinants of health (e.g. food security), yet there are no systems in place at the organizational level to capture this type of data in an evaluation. Nevertheless, there is a desire to be more specific and granular in observing any relationship between postsecondary success and social determinants of health; thus the foundation is moving to a more intentional evaluation strategy with outside consultants and utilizing internal systems such as Microsoft's Power BI.

Investments in data capacity and evaluation also serve to support the foundation's strategy in postsecondary attainment by helping to identify where success is occurring and where more resources may need to be invested. The provision of data is an objective entry point into strategic discussions that may otherwise be difficult to have with partners. These strategic discussions can deepen relationships with partners by opening up honest conversations about the success or lack thereof among their current work, as well as create opportunities for collaborative solutions.

The foundation is interested in evaluating the long-term impact of gains in middle-skills employment on the overall health of families. Currently, foundation partners are focused on whether individuals receiving postsecondary education or training are obtaining and retaining middle-skills jobs. However, there is an opportunity to use data to understand potential outcomes of employment retention on the long-term economic well-being of their children, for example. Evaluations requiring longitudinal data are often costly and require higher levels of capacity from both the funder and their partners. It is important that funders strategically invest in data and evaluation capacity to support organizations in assessing long-term impact, particularly if the investments are intended to impact systemic factors. Funder investments might include assistance to organizations in vetting potential evaluation consultants, creating scopes of work given organizational capacity, providing financial resources for data collection and analytics technology, offering venues for reflecting on data, providing funds to organizations and communities to build local evaluation capacity, and working with community to reflect on data and generate collaborative solutions.

One learning of the foundation is that in order to do this deep-level community work and to employ SMIRF capital in a way that is beneficial for partners, the foundation must increase the number of its employees. Currently there is one program officer who oversees the SCIP portfolio in eight communities. Similarly, other foundations should invest in their own capacity to learn and adapt in complex environments. For instance,

they might consider hiring staff whose role it is to build internal muscle for strategic shifts.

This learning and adaptation role is important: Program staff often do not have time to critically reflect on the data collected through their portfolios and often focus on individual grants rather than the overall portfolio. Having internal supports available to identify and incorporate key learnings into strategy can serve as a catalyst for moving the needle on complex issues such as postsecondary attainment.

Finally, the foundation does not expect communities to implement a one-size-fits-all approach to postsecondary attainment — rather, they provide resources to organizations to help support the use of data to develop programs and services that meet local needs. All applicants and partners that are focused on addressing postsecondary attainment and sustaining employment are required to use the Occupational Employment Statistics from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020) to inform and evaluate their strategies. The foundation recommends this dataset as a tool to help organizations plan and evaluate their strategies at a systems level, identifying jobs that are most relevant in their area and that pay a living wage.

Because this is a key element of the foundation's postsecondary attainment strategy, it is important that grantees and community stakeholders have timely data on the wages for jobs in their communities so they can develop an appropriate career pipeline to advance workers into higher-paying jobs. Foundation partners are also encouraged to use the Public Use Microdata Areas dataset to better understand the population they are serving and to identify communities that may need postsecondary resources but are not currently being served (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

## Conclusion

Tackling upstream determinants is complex and requires an operational and cognitive model that factors in the interconnectedness and context of social determinants, which, to identify, requires a deep understanding of community. The Humana Foundation has spent the last two

years learning from partners, studying the literature, and co-creating new solutions to address postsecondary attainment and other social determinants of health to better meet the challenges and opportunities of the communities it serves. To accomplish similar efforts, foundations may consider how to more closely partner with their grantees and local stakeholders to bolster community work. For instance, particularly in foundations serving a large geographic area, supporting a local community liaison to be the foundation's expert in that region, building partnerships and leveraging community resources, can advance community work more effectively than can foundation staff who work at a distance. A local expert can be a key leverage point for complex initiatives that require contextual knowledge, such as postsecondary attainment and sustaining employment.

Foundations interested in working on social determinants of health may also consider diving into a diverse exploration of root causes that should begin with meeting with local partners to identify key challenges and opportunities, understand resources at the community level, and become grounded in the historical context in which the work will take place. This exploration can also include speaking with other foundations about their approaches and working with local academic institutions to review and incorporate evidence-based research. The foundation's strategy for postsecondary attainment has considered all of these inputs and continues to explore other avenues for strategic change, such as learning communities.

Finally, a major consideration for foundations interested in working on social determinants of health is their commitment to long-term investments of staff time and financial resources that are necessary to impact systemic change. Conversations with board members, staff, and community stakeholders are necessary to gauge interest in and stamina for this long-term work.

It is far too early to determine whether the Humana Foundation and its partners have been successful in closing systemic gaps in postsecondary attainment. However, from the examples

*Tackling upstream determinants is complex and requires an operational and cognitive model that factors in the interconnectedness and context of social determinants, which, to identify, requires a deep understanding of community.*

provided in this article, it can be said that the foundation is making strides in partnering with communities to identify and support successful models for improving postsecondary attainment and moving individuals into middle skills employment. Where in the past the foundation would have internally developed grantmaking programs, it is now actively engaging with grantees and partners to inform its work and pivot to meet community needs.

With active engagement, however, comes the need for greater accountability. Strategic approaches to learning are being considered to share discoveries, grow and deepen relationships with partners, and support the capacity of both the foundation and communities to create innovative solutions to increase postsecondary attainment and employment sustainability.

## Acknowledgments

This article is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the Humana Foundation. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the NSF.

## References

ADLER, N., & NEWMAN, K. (2002, March-April). Socioeconomic disparities in health: Pathways and policies. *Health Affairs*, 21(2). Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.21.2.60>

BERZOFSKY, M., SMILEY-MCDONALD, H., MOORE, A., & KREBS, C. (2014). *Measuring socioeconomic status (SES) in the NCVS: Background, options, and recommendations*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved from [https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/Measuring\\_SES-Paper\\_authorship\\_corrected.pdf](https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/Measuring_SES-Paper_authorship_corrected.pdf)

CAMPBELL, D., LAMMING, J., LEMP, C., BROSNAHAN, A., PATERSON, C., & PUSEY, J. (2008). Public work projects cultivate youth workforce development programs. *California Agriculture*, 62(1), 40–46.

CARNEVALE, A., STROHL, J., RIDLEY, N., & GULISH, A. (2018). *Three educational pathways to good jobs: High school, middle skills, and bachelor's degree*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. Retrieved from <https://1gyhoq47ufd3yna29x7ubjn-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/3ways-FR.pdf>

CARNEVALE, A., ROSE, S., & CHEAH, J. (2011). *The college payoff: Education, occupations, lifetime earnings*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/highered/reg/hearulemaking/2011/collegepayoff.pdf>

CENTER FOR HEALTH EQUITY. (2017). *Health equity report*. Louisville, KY: Louisville Metro Department of Public Health and Wellness. Retrieved March 12, 2020, from <https://louisvilleky.gov/government/center-health-equity/health-equity-report>

HALL, R. (2015). *Subsidized employment programs*. Washington, DC: CLASP. Retrieved from <https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/public/resources-and-publications/publication-1/Subsidized-Employment-Programs-1.pdf>

HOLZER, H. (2008). *Workforce development as an antipoverty strategy: What do we know? What should we do?* Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/32121/411782-Workforce-Development-as-an-Antipoverty-Strategy.PDF>

JAIN, R., NEWMAN, A., & MONTES, M. (2017). *Investing in workforce program innovation: A formative evaluation of five workforce organizations' experiences during the Human Capital Innovation Fund initiative*. Washington, DC: Aspen Institute. Retrieved from <https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2017/03/Investing-in-Workforce-Program-Innovation.pdf>

KATZ, L., POO, A., & WAXMAN, E. (2018). *Imagining a future of work that fosters mobility for us all*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Retrieved from [https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/lkatz/files/future\\_of\\_work\\_paper.pdf](https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/lkatz/files/future_of_work_paper.pdf)

KHULLAR, D., & CHOKSHI, D. (2018, October 4). *Health, income, & poverty: Where we are & what could help*. *Health Affairs*. Retrieved from <https://www.healthaffairs.org/do/10.1377/hpb20180817.901935/full/>

MAGUIRE, S., FREELY, J., CLYMER, C., CONWAY, M., & SCHWARTZ, D. (2010). *Tuning in to local labor markets: Findings from the Sectoral Employment Impact Study*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures. Retrieved from <http://ppv.issuelab.org/resources/5101/5101.pdf>

NATIONAL ACADEMIES OF SCIENCES, ENGINEERING, AND MEDICINE. (2017). *Communities in action: Pathways to health equity*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK425848/pdf/Bookshelf\\_NBK425848.pdf](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK425848/pdf/Bookshelf_NBK425848.pdf)

RAY, S. M., GALVAN, O., & ZARESTKY, J. (2018). Gender-inclusive educational programs for workforce development. *Adult Learning*, 29(3), 94–103.

RODER, A., & ELLIOT, M. (2019). *Nine year gains: Project QUEST's continuing impact*. New York, NY: Economic Mobility Corporation. Retrieved from [https://economicmobilitycorp.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/NineYearGains\\_web.pdf](https://economicmobilitycorp.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/NineYearGains_web.pdf)

SCHNUR, C., WARLAND, C., YOUNG, M., & ZRALEK, B. (2013). *Work matters: Employment as a tool for preventing homelessness and improving health*. New York, NY: Candid. Retrieved from <https://www.issuelab.org/resource/work-matters-employment-as-a-tool-for-preventing-homelessness-and-improving-health.html>

U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS. (2020). *Occupational employment statistics*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oessrcma.htm>

U.S. CENSUS BUREAU. (2020). *Public use microdata areas*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/guidance/geo-areas/pumas.html>

WIEDRICH, K., RICE, S., SIMS, JR., L., & WEISMAN, H. (2017). *On track or left behind? Findings from the 2017 Prosperity Now Scorecard*. Washington, DC: Prosperity Now. Retrieved from [https://prosperitynow.org/files/PDFs/2017\\_Scorecard\\_Report.pdf](https://prosperitynow.org/files/PDFs/2017_Scorecard_Report.pdf)

**Melissa B. Eggen, M.P.H.**, is a Ph.D. student at the University of Louisville and program manager for the Center for Health Organization Transformation at the university's School of Public Health and Information Sciences. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Melissa B. Eggen, Center for Health Organization Transformation, University of Louisville School of Public Health and Information Sciences, 485 East Gray Street, Louisville, KY, 40202 (email: melissa.eggen@louisville.edu).

**J'Aime C. Jennings, Ph.D.**, is associate professor in the Department of Health Management System Sciences at the University of Louisville and co-site director for the Center of Health Organization Transformation at the university's School of Public Health and Information Sciences.

**Molly O'Keefe, M.S.H.A.**, is a law student at Harvard Law School and formerly a graduate student in the Department of Health Management and Systems Sciences at the University of Louisville.

**Brandy N. Kelly Pryor, Ph.D.**, is senior director of programs at the Humana Foundation.

**Leslie Clements, M.S.**, is senior program officer at the Humana Foundation.