



# Building Stronger Communities for Better Health

Brian D. Smedley, Ph.D.

The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies

[www.jointcenter.org](http://www.jointcenter.org)

# Neighborhood Factors Influence Health Through:

- Direct effects on both physical and mental health
- Indirect influences on behaviors that have health consequences
- Health impacts resulting from the quality and availability of health care
- Health impacts associated with the availability of opportunity structures (e.g., access to healthy food, safe spaces, capital, transportation)

# The Challenges:

- Health inequality will get worse as a result of the economic downturn.
- Despite the historic nature of the 2008 election, the United States is NOT “post-racial” – to the extent that this perception exists, political pressure for action will be diminished.
- The “individual determinist” orientation remains predominant in the United States

# What's Needed

- A focus on prevention, particularly on the conditions in which people live, work, play, and study
- Multiple strategies across sectors
- Sustained investment and a long-term policy agenda

# Create Healthier Communities:

- Improve food and nutritional options through incentives for Farmer's Markets and grocery stores, and regulation of fast food and liquor stores
- Structure land use and zoning policy to reduce the concentration of health risks
- Institute Health Impact Assessments to determine the public health consequences of any new housing, transportation, labor, education policies

# Improve the Physical Environment of Communities:

- Improve air quality (e.g., by relocating bus depots further from homes and schools)
- Expand the availability of open space (e.g., encourage exercise- and pedestrian-friendly communities)
- Address disproportionate environmental impacts (e.g., encourage Brownfields redevelopment)

## Expand Opportunities for Quality Education:

- Expand high-quality preschool programs
- Create incentives to attract experienced, credentialed teachers to work in poor schools
- Take steps to equalize school funding
- Expand and improve curriculum, including better college prep coursework
- Reduce financial barriers to higher education

# Expand Economic Opportunities:

- Promote job training and economic development for 21<sup>st</sup> Century jobs (e.g., technology, “green jobs”)
- Facilitate access from isolated neighborhoods to new job centers
- Encourage public and private reinvestment in low-income communities (e.g., “double bottom line” strategies that benefit investors and communities)