



# Healthy Communities Delaware

Strategic Direction 2025 - 2028

# The Healthy Communities Delaware Network

## Working together to improve health, well-being and equity

Healthy Communities Delaware (HCD) is a network of community and investment partners working together to advance health, well-being and equity across our state. Health and well-being are primarily driven by the communities in which we live, learn, work and play, and less by the healthcare that we receive. For this reason, HCD focuses on improving the community conditions that support holistic well-being.

Vital signs, like heart rate, temperature, and weight tell us what is going on in our bodies. Vital Conditions tell us what is going on in our communities and the world around us. Vital Conditions are the properties of our communities that we all need, all the time, to thrive and reach our full potential.

Healthy Communities Delaware invests in communities to improve the Vital Conditions that are prioritized by residents, giving voice and power to those who know their community best. The community-based work is carried out by local organizational partners that provide the infrastructure to facilitate community transformation.

Our work is equity-focused, place-based, community-driven, and long-term. It improves the Vital Conditions that all people and places need to thrive.

### Vital Conditions for Health, Well-Being and Equity

The vital conditions are properties of our communities that we all need, all the time, to thrive.



## Process Overview

Between April and July 2025, HCD staff, partners, and council members participated in a comprehensive strategic process structured around four core sessions and additional touchpoints with operational and leadership teams. The purpose was to define the next 2-3 years of strategic direction in an ideal environment, while also identifying the core, most impactful components of the HCD model that should be retained in a scenario of decreased funding.

Recognizing the uncertainty around full operational funding, the team made a conscious shift from building a static strategic plan to developing a dynamic strategic direction. This allows HCD to remain responsive and adaptive while anchoring its work in deeply held values and community priorities.

Participants:

- Operations Team
- Management Team
- Leadership Council
- Community Partner Representatives (Community Partners are organizations that facilitate the local work to improve vital conditions in a specific community, often a nonprofit or municipality.)

Each session centered community voice, transparency, and adaptive strategy in light of the possibility of major operational funding shifts.

Session Focus Areas:

- Reflecting on HCD's identity and irreplaceable value in the ecosystem
- Conducting SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results) analysis to identify strengths and possibilities
- Developing goals aligned to current capacity and vision
- Naming audacious goals for long-term transformation
- Planning for financial, structural, and systemic resilience

## Process Engagement Frameworks

Three main frameworks guided our engagement. The questions and summaries of responses are included below.

1. **Imagination: What if HCD no longer existed?** Participants reflected on what would be lost without HCD:

- A neutral backbone entity that breaks silos and fosters alignment
- A place-based, resident-first approach to funding and leadership
- The only statewide steward of the Vital Conditions framework
- A funder that operates through trust, flexibility, and authenticity

## 2. Envisioning the Future: What must be preserved, expanded, and reimaged?

Participants explored:

- What HCD must preserve regardless of structure?
- What bold strategies will further dismantle inequity?
- How to align limited resources to high-impact actions?

Responses to these questions are included in the SOAR analysis results below and inform the strategic priorities proposed.

## 3. SOAR Analysis:

### Strengths

- Deep trust with communities and partners
- Vital Conditions as a shared framework
- Capacity-building and technical assistance for grassroots organizations
- Ability to convene across silos and systems

### Opportunities

- Complete scenario planning and secure transition pathways
- Expand storytelling to attract national investment
- Position HCD as the statewide accountability hub for Vital Conditions integration
- Train new practitioners in the Vital Conditions framework statewide
- Engage healthcare systems in aligned investment
- Increase investment in Kent and Sussex Counties
- Build philanthropic and private-sector partnerships

### Aspirations

- Achieve full Vital Conditions framework integration in statewide planning
- Be a national model of trust-based, community-driven philanthropy
- Sustain grassroots work through creative funding models

### Results

- Update evaluation plan
- Expand impact documentation and dissemination

Based on the feedback throughout the process and the goal of building a strategic direction that can be adapted based on resources, Healthy Communities Delaware adopted the following strategic direction and priorities for the period of July 2025 through June 2028. This is a living document that will be adapted as needed.

## Strategic Direction

**Vision:** We envision healthy, safe and vibrant communities across Delaware, where ALL people are thriving, no exceptions.

**Mission:** We work with communities, investors and systems to create thriving places for thriving people. We do this by strengthening Vital Conditions--the properties of a community that we all need, all the time, to thrive and reach our full potential.

**Core Principles:** Place-based, equity-focused, community-driven, long-term

## Priorities

**Overall Goal:** Strengthen community Vital Conditions to improve health, well-being and equity over the long term.

### Strategy 1: Operational Infrastructure

#### Create a Strong and Flexible Operational Infrastructure

Objective 1.1. Complete scenario planning by developing a minimum viable model outlining the most critical work and staffing.

Objective 1.2. Develop a scalable staffing plan to support the achievement of the strategic plan.

Objective 1.3. Document and disseminate key lessons learned.

Objective 1.4. Activate storytelling for increased investment.

Action 1.4.1. Update pitch slide deck and one-pager.

Action 1.4.2. Create a case study to showcase at least one community + partner + HCD success story.

Action 1.4.3. Create a tracking mechanism to show trends in the Vital Conditions indicators, and incorporate this into storytelling efforts.

Objective 1.5. Stabilize current funding for HCD operations and community investment.

Objective 1.6. Acquire new funding sources to support the implementation of the strategic plan.

Action 1.6.1. Submit a grant proposal to at least one national funder each year.

Objective 1.7. Update the HCD evaluation plan.

Long-Term: Launch a fee-for-service social enterprise arm

## **Strategy 2: Capacity-Building**

### **Provide capacity-building opportunities to support community partners in improving vital conditions.**

Objective 2.1. Implement the core elements of the HCD model: peer learning, HCD-partner liaison, support beyond funding.

Action 2.1.1. Develop a model for maintaining relationships with community partners as they move in and out of grant funded status.

Action 2.1.2. Co-create and share community development lessons learned with partners and other communities doing similar work.

Objective 2.2. Provide learning opportunities and funding to explore and implement sustained collaboration options (e.g., shared back office services, merger, etc.) to increase likelihood of community organization sustainability.

Objective 2.3. Provide free access to the Community Development Institute and/or other professional development opportunities.

## **Strategy 3: Community Investment**

### **Align long-term, sustainable, and flexible funding streams for investment into communities.**

Objective 3.1. Continue HCD community investments through implementation of the established grant-making process.

Action 3.1.1 Implement strategies for sustaining/increasing investment to communities in Kent/Sussex Counties.

Objective 3.2. Update community investment acquisition strategy to include endowments, private sector funding, hospital community benefit dollars, and/or trust-based co-investment.

Objective 3.3. Define HCD investment priorities and share with existing and potential partners.

Objective 3.4. Share lessons learned with funders to 1) shed light on community needs and gaps in funding and 2) advocate for more and more accessible funding for community development efforts.

Objective 3.5. Create a two-way communication infrastructure to connect funders with community projects of interest to them, and community organizations to funders.

Objective 3.6. Build a network of champions in public and private sector organizations to share the value of the HCD model and acquire additional investment.

## **Strategy 4: Field-Building**

**Support shifts in practice to increase use of the vital conditions, long-term thinking, and community-driven focuses.**

Objective 4.1. Document and disseminate key lessons learned.

Objective 4.2. Develop a small suite of key materials to help organizations understand and use the Vital Conditions framework.

Objective 4.3. Create a page on the HCD website to enable these resources to be freely downloaded by shared stewards.

Objective 4.3. Disseminate these resources to inform stewards across the nation about their availability, and track dissemination efforts and downloads.

Objective 4.4. Engage with, learn from and inform similar initiatives across the globe.

## **Strategy 5: Policy and Systems Change**

**Facilitate policy and systems change that improves the vital conditions, increases investment for the vital conditions, or creates an enabling environment for equitable community development.**

Objective 5.1. Create a strategy for policy and systems change that is opportunistic and promotes vital conditions and multisolving key concepts.

Objective 5.2. Create a regional advocacy backbone strategy to advance equitable community development.

Action 5.2.1. Advocate for policies that support greater investment in improving the Vital Conditions.

Objective 5.3. Embed Vital Conditions into state funding, planning, and accountability systems.

Action 5.3.1. Embed Vital Conditions into at least one state process.

Objective 5.4. Implement and track progress on policy and systems change opportunities supported by HCD resources.

Long-Term: Partner with the Governor's Office or a state department to advance multi-solving solutions across systems (education, housing, health).

## WORKING TOGETHER FOR THRIVING PLACES AND THRIVING PEOPLE

We thank our advisors, investors, and community partners for their commitment to fostering thriving communities throughout Delaware.

### Management Team

Healthy Communities Delaware is managed as a collaboration among the Delaware Community Foundation, Delaware Division of Public Health, and the University of Delaware Partnership for Healthy Communities.

Tesha Quail, Deputy Director, Delaware Division of Public Health  
Stuart Comstock-Gay, President and CEO, Delaware Community Foundation  
Yendelela Cuffee, Associate Director, UD Partnership for Healthy Communities  
Strategy Advisor, Rita Landgraf, University of Delaware

### Operations Team

Kate Dupont Phillips, Executive Director  
Linda Tholstrup, Partner Liaison & Special Projects  
Monica Castellano, Partner Liaison & Evaluation

### Leadership Council

Brian Rahmer, University of Delaware  
Carrie Casey, New Castle County  
Christopher Moody, Delaware Technical Community College  
Dan Cruce, United Way of Delaware  
David Edgell, Delaware Office of State Planning Coordination  
Don Fulton, Delaware Health Fund Advisory Group  
Dorothy Dillard, Delaware State University  
Dorrell Green, Red Clay School District  
Jules Villeco, Delaware Healthcare Association  
Karen Speakman, NeighborGood Partners  
Maggie Norris-Bent, Westside Healthcare  
Matt Parks, Discover Bank  
Matt Swanson, Reciprocity Health  
Peggy Geisler, PMG Consulting, LLC  
Steven Peuquet, Univ. of DE Center for Comm. Research (retired)  
Terrence Keeling, Central Baptist Community Development Corp.  
Tynetta Brown, Philanthropy Delaware



## Community Partners - Current and Past

Northwest Wilmington - Jefferson Street Center

West Side Wilmington - Be Ready Community Development Corporation, Cornerstone West Community Development Corporation, Latin American Community Center

West Center City Wilmington - Wilmington Alliance

Northeast Wilmington - Northeast Community Development Corporation, Collaborate Northeast

Eastside Wilmington - Central Baptist Community Development Corporation, Habitat for Humanity of New Castle County

Southbridge Wilmington - Southbridge Community Development Corporation, South Wilmington Planning Network

Rt. 9 Corridor New Castle - Rt. 9 Community Development Corporation, Rt. 9 Master Plan Monitoring Committee

Dover - NeighborGood Partners, Central Delaware Habitat for Humanity

Georgetown - Springboard Collaborative, La Esperanza

Milford - Milford Housing Development Corporation

Laurel - End Community Violence Now

Seaford - Seaford Community of Hope

Ellendale - SERCAP

Bridgeville - Town of Bridgeville, Cornerstone Community Center

Cheswold/Lenape Census District - Greenbridge Community Development Corporation

## Collaborative Investors

Delaware Division of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Health

Highmark Delaware

Nemours Children's Health

Discover Bank

Astra Zeneca

DuPont



## TALK WITH US

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