

Policies for Action:

Policy and Law Research to Build a Culture of Health

Research Vision and Roadmap

Our Vision

Policies for Action (P4A) was created in 2015 as one of three signature research programs of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF). P4A solicits, funds, supports, and disseminates transdisciplinary research to help develop the evidence base on policies, laws, regulatory changes, systems interventions, and community dynamics that can promote the goals of RWJF's *Culture of Health Action Framework*.

P4A is eager to work with researchers and other experts from multiple fields, including health care, mental and behavioral health, and public health; early childhood through post-secondary education and vocational training; labor market, employment, and job quality; housing and community development; community safety and criminal justice; planning and transportation; energy and the environment; and technology and communication.

We want to better understand how policies generated by these sectors impact population health, well-being, and equity. By *policies*, we mean not just laws and regulations at the local, state, and federal level, but also private sector practices, such as those affecting community development and employment policies that promote well-being. We are interested in evaluating the impacts of *established* laws, regulations, or policies; *new* policies and approaches; and *funding or other mechanisms* for implementing, enforcing, or sustaining them.

Our goal is to support innovative research that generates actionable evidence about how, and how well, laws and policies work—the data and information that can guide legislators and other policymakers, public agencies and private firms, educators, advocates, community groups, and individuals concerned with developing and implementing policies for community and population health.

[P4A] “is trying to understand and actually show some evidence around the pathway for policy change and what kinds of policies seem to have the most impact on improving the kinds of population health outcomes we are interested in.”

- Alonzo Plough, Vice President of Research-Evaluation-Learning and Chief Science Officer, RWJF, as quoted in *Health Affairs*

What We're Doing

RWJF's P4A program is administered by a [national coordinating center \(NCC\)](#) at the Urban Institute. Led by Lisa Dubay, PhD and Laudan Aron, MA, the program builds on the Urban Institute's wealth of experience in health, social welfare, and social and economic policy, including its [cross-center initiative on the social determinants of health](#) that brings together experts spanning health, housing, labor, income and benefits, justice, and tax policy.

Already in its second year, P4A currently supports and coordinates 11 research teams that conduct more than 20 projects spanning a wide range of topics including housing, nutrition, paid family leave, early childhood education, transportation, access to health care, and social impact investing. The NCC works in collaboration with **five research hubs** at New York University, the University of Illinois at Chicago together with Washington University in St. Louis, the University of Michigan, Temple University, and the Urban Institute. Each hub conducts several research projects. In 2016, P4A also welcomed its **first six grantees**, each focusing on a single research project. This work is being done through Brown University, Columbia University, Northwestern University, Providence Portland Medical Center, the University of Florida together with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and the University of Southern California together with the University of Chicago. Together, the collaboration among the NCC and these institutions brings expertise and experience in conducting research that matters at the local, state, and national policy levels, and exemplifies our aim of supporting cross-sector and transdisciplinary research.

Moving Forward

Building from this foundation, we continue to develop the P4A program. Through new calls for proposals (CFPs), we seek to fund research that can help inform the significant gaps in our knowledge regarding what policy levers can serve as positive drivers of change. These levers can address any of the multiple points along the complex causal pathways linking **the social determinants of health and various measures of population health, well-being, and equity**.

Newly proposed research might reflect one or more of these principles or qualities that often distinguish population health approaches to improvements in health and well-being:

- Focus on critical periods over the life course that have lifelong multigenerational benefits;
- Are preventive rather than remedial;
- Advance a community's own priorities;
- Address people, places, or systems that have been traditionally underserved or overlooked;
- Foster stability and continuity in health-promoting conditions at neighborhood, community, state, or federal levels;
- Transform or bridge major service systems, such as health care and public health, or other systems that influence health in communities, such as social services or education;
- Involve collaborations between the public and private sectors, or innovations within the private sector alone;
- Could feasibly be implemented (potential policies) or maintained, scaled, and/or spread (existing policies); and
- Influence values and beliefs integral to a Culture of Health.

Now more than ever, Policies for Action and RWJF are committed to expanding this evidence base and disseminating research findings that can be translated into action.

For more information and program updates: www.policiesforaction.org • Policies4Action@urban.org • [@Policies4Action](https://twitter.com/Policies4Action)

Policies for Action is a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation administered at the Urban Institute.