

California needs to look at taking a community health approach

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When we think about health, we typically think about it in the context of an individual—perhaps ourselves, or a friend or loved one. Health is something that is deeply personal.

Our healthcare system reflects this way of thinking. In the United States, many of our institutions revolve around patient-centered care. In many ways, this individualized focus is beneficial, allowing us to personalize care for every patient.

Yet health is not only an individual matter—it's also something that is heavily influenced by our community. To any particular person, community can mean their family, the city or town they live in, or the religious, ethnic or social groups they belong to. What is certain is that one's community largely defines the social, economic and environmental conditions that they live in, which in turn have an incredible impact on their individual health.

In order to deliver the very

best outcomes for every individual, we need to better recognize and address these factors. This requires a community health approach that addresses the broader social and environmental factors that impact individual health.

When implemented correctly, this approach can have a transformative impact by increasing access to medical care, improving the health literacy of the community and reducing health disparities. This is especially true for older adults and those with significant medical, mental health and social support needs who rely more heavily on their communities.

This is particularly important in California, where low-income households face challenges in accessing medical care, healthy food and stable housing. Geographic factors can lead to disparities in healthcare infrastructure, with some regions lacking sufficient healthcare providers. All of this leads to poorer health outcomes. By investing more in community health initiatives, we can make meaningful progress towards a healthier, more equitable California.

Establishing an effective

community health approach requires the active participation and trust of different stakeholders—think community non-profit organizations, local government, healthcare professionals and senior centers. Oftentimes, community health workers serve as the link between these stakeholders, filling gaps that may not otherwise be met.

For example, in California, *promotores*—healthcare workers who support Spanish communities—play an essential role in our communities. By getting these groups involved, it ensures that initiatives will have community buy-in and be structured to meet its actual needs and priorities.

Taking a holistic view of health is another essential piece. Our health is heavily influenced by physical, mental, social and environmental factors. In California, one in seven adults experience a mental illness. This issue has only gotten worse with the pandemic. At CCA Health, we've designed programs for our health plan members to address this issue of loneliness and isolation, like the Buddy Line, which matches our members with trained volunteers,



Photo by FatCamera, Canva

Ultimately, the most important part of community health is addressing the underlying racial, ethnic and socioeconomic determinants contributing to health inequality. California has a variety of programs focused on this issue—everything from farm-to-school initiatives that help get healthy food into our schools to health plans like CCA Health, which factor in cultural sensitivity to everything we do. But we need more programs like these.

California is facing a serious problem regarding the health of our communities, but we

don't have to accept things the way they are, and we don't need to rely on traditional tools to address them. By embracing a community health approach and considering the collective well-being of every community, we can transform the health and quality of life of an entire community.



UNDERSTANDING DEMENTIA & CARING FOR A LOVED ONE WITH DEMENTIA

Presented by Sutter Health at Home
Hospice of the Valley

Monday, March 11
2-3pm

Saratoga Senior Center
Fireside Room

Join us for an insightful workshop on Dementia Care, where we will explore essential tools and strategies for supporting our loved ones facing dementia. Whether you are a caregiver, family member, or someone interested in learning more about dementia, this workshop will provide practical insights into effective caregiving techniques.

After this workshop, you will be able to:

- Define Dementia
- Identify ways to:
 - Create a calm environment
 - Keep patient safe
 - Help keep someone with Dementia hydrated and nourished
- Recognize signs & symptoms
- Discuss treatment and management options for dementia
- Behavioral Strategies
- Medications
- Understand dementia in the context of hospice



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