



Why Funding Should Flow Directly to Community-Based Organizations from the California Health Equity & Racial Justice Fund

What are the distinctive contributions of community-based organizations (CBOs) to promoting health equity and racial justice?

CBOs are valued for their on-the-ground knowledge of emerging issues in their communities and critical contributions in designing strategies to address them.

For example, in one community, CBO leaders know why families won't bring their children to play in certain parks. In another, they know why particular streets are dangerous to walk on. In another, they know why some groups of residents are underemployed. The "why" often involves issues related to structural racism and/or the social determinants of health that are not apparent to an outside observer. And, because they understand the "why," CBOs are essential partners in identifying, developing, and helping implement effective solutions to local inequities.

How have CBOs helped to fight COVID-19?

Due to their cultural and linguistic capacity and trusted relationships with members of their communities, CBOs are playing vital roles in expanding the reach of COVID-19 testing, contact tracing, and vaccination. These organizations are also addressing the social impacts of the pandemic specific to their communities, for example, expanding access to culturally appropriate food, developing local solutions for affordable housing, navigating assistance for small businesses and more.

Why should funding from the Health Equity and Racial Justice Fund flow directly to CBOs?

The work of CBOs to advance equity and justice can be thwarted by local politics. In October 2020, the local health department requested the Kern County Board of Supervisors to approve a contract with a coalition of nonprofits to support door-to-door health education in communities hardest hit by COVID-19 during a severe moment in the pandemic. The contract was rejected. The reason? The coalition had expressed support on social media for diverting funding from police departments to other causes and, as one Supervisor put it, "I think how our sheriff's department... would feel if the county of Kern contracts with an organization that is calling for their defunding."¹

In September 2021, despite the pleas of the local health director, the Yuba County Board of Supervisors denied a contract with a nonprofit organization to hire additional local contact tracers. The rationale? Advice from a personal doctor is sufficient, contact tracing does not add value, and funding should be spent on treatment such as hydroxychloroquine.²

These examples show why funds from the California Health Equity & Racial Justice Fund *must flow directly to CBOs*. There are many other locales where CBOs' hands are tied from implementing effective, locally led initiatives. The stakes are far too dire for effective solutions that promote public health, health equity, and racial justice to be suppressed by county-level political bodies.

¹https://www.bakersfield.com/news/kern-county-under-investigation-after-denying-group-covid-contract-over-support-for-defunding-police/article_79e3aaa0-1bcb-11ec-b581-6fe302fa3a8d.html

² <https://news.yahoo.com/yuba-county-supes-fail-approve-040100499.html?guccounter=1>