
SUMMARY OF WE ACT'S ENHANCED INCUBATION PLAN

Achieving Health Equity by Addressing the Social Determinants of Health Through Hospital Community Benefits

WE ACT for Environmental Justice (WE ACT) is a Harlem based non-profit organization working to build healthy communities by ensuring that people of color and/or low income residents participate meaningfully in the creation of sound and fair environmental health and protection policies and practices. The Northern Manhattan community within which WE ACT has a membership base of over 700 local residents is considered an environmental justice community, primarily comprised of Latinx and African Americans who face clear environmental injustices, such as substandard housing conditions and poor air quality. Engaging these communities can be challenging due to varying levels of literacy, language barriers, and fear (for example, the fear of being deported as an undocumented immigrant). Building trust between hospitals and their communities is crucial in engaging all groups.

WE ACT envisions creating a bi-directional understanding between hospitals, community-based organizations (CBOs), and community members about the opportunities that exist for the proper distribution and maximization of hospital community benefit (HCB) dollars. This can be achieved through a more comprehensive needs assessment process and a prevention-based approach to community benefit activities that will help address the social determinants of health (SDoH). This preventative approach to address health concerns at their source would reduce patient visits to the hospital and would in turn reduce hospital and healthcare system spending. We believe the hospital community benefit program presents an opportunity to go beyond acute patient care and to examine and mitigate the root causes of persistent health issues such as diet, exercise, respiratory irritants, and stress, which will ultimately enhance community health.



In May 2018 WE ACT facilitated a dialogue through which many local residents along with other stakeholders contributed their ideas for improving the HCB program. Through that dialogue WE ACT created a Community Benefits Guidebook and Hospital Report of Recommendations. The goal of distributing these publications will not only be for the ongoing education of the community, but also for hospitals to begin adopting the recommendations to better serve our communities most in need of HCB dollars.

Guided by recommendations from the NASEM Communities in Action: Pathways to Health Equity report, WE ACT plans to achieve our goal of addressing the SDoH through HCBs through the following objectives:

- 1** Within 5-years the IRS will provide regulatory guidance on hospital community benefits to more definitively include community health improvement and community building activities.
- 2** Over the course of 5 years, WE ACT will develop a model of how hospitals can work with CBOs and community members on community health needs assessments (CHNAs) and maximize the use of HCB dollars to address the SDoH and serve community needs.
- 3** Over the course of 3 years, WE ACT will improve the understanding among CBOs and community members of the ways in which HCB dollars can be used as resources to address local health needs.

WE ACT is working with a number of key stakeholders to help achieve these objectives. These stakeholders include: hospital representatives and administrators, other community based organizations, community members, expert researchers who have analyzed the HCB program and CHNA requirements, as well as city, state, and federal elected officials and legislators. Additionally, WE ACT is working on developing relationships with key funders who understand and believe in the vision that WE ACT has outlined above to improve the HCB program and CHNA process. Grant funding, paired with relationships with key hospital representatives and policy makers, could provide an opportunity to increase the efficacy of CBO involvement in the CHNA process and HCB program to address the SDoH.

