



HEALTH  
BEGINS



# 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

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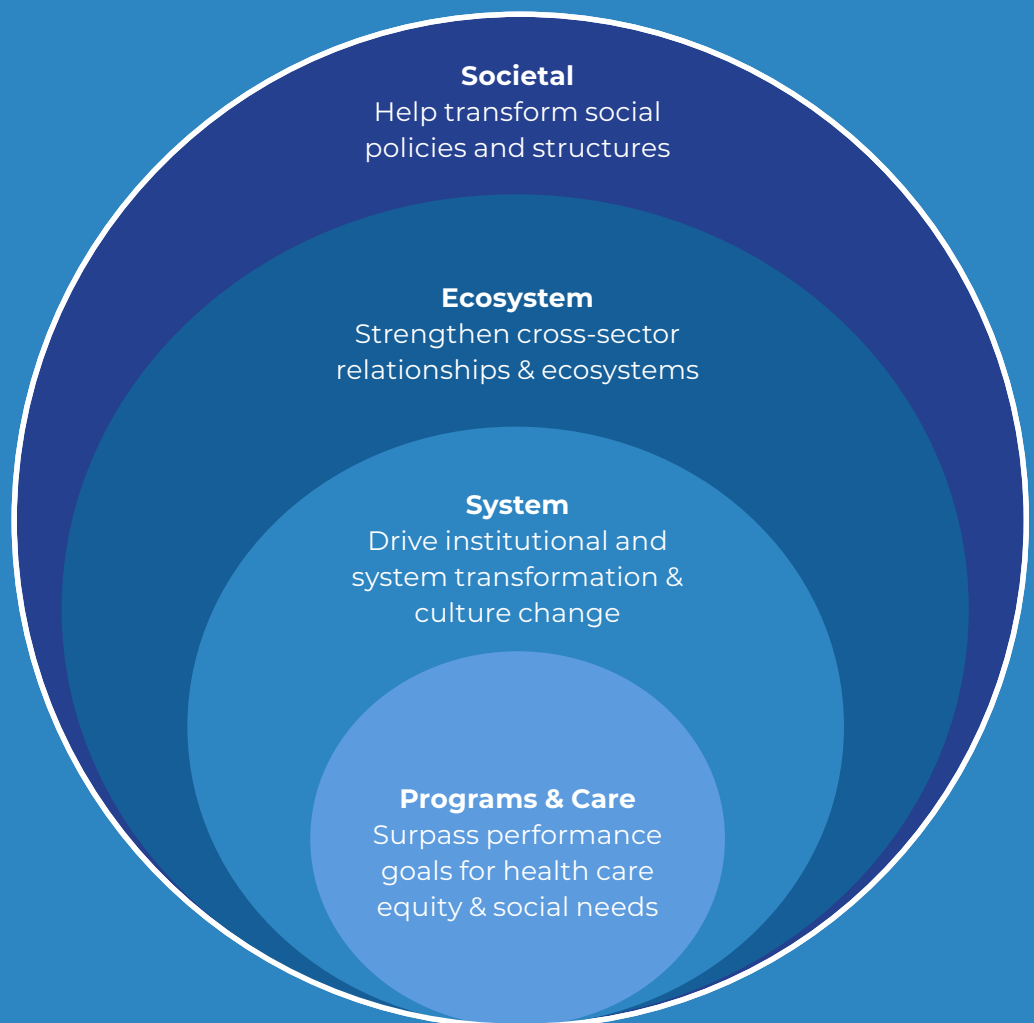
The power and resources to ensure health for all exist. **The problem is that too few have access to them.**

You have the **courage**.  
We have the **strategies**.

**Let's fix it.**

### The Compass for Health Equity Transformation

Health equity and justice require cohesive strategies across levels of impact



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

02	A Message From the CEO & Managing Director
04	By the Numbers
08	Vision, Mission, & Values
10	Meet Our Team
15	How HealthBegins Helps
16	Practice Area: Optimize and Accelerate Upstream Investments
20	Practice Area: Strengthen Health Care and Social Service Partnerships
24	Practice Area: Build and Share Power to Advance Health Equity
28	Solutions
30	Focus Areas
32	Thought Leadership
36	Connect With Us

# Dear friends,

Across the nation, leaders face tests of mettle and courage in this moment of change. A flurry of actions, events, and headlines demand responses from health care and present an opportunity for health care to lead amid uncertainty and fear.

At the same time, many families are living in a **crisis of affordability** that affects matters as essential as housing, food, and of course, health care—where financialization has driven care further from many people's reach.

At HealthBegins, we see the affordability crisis, alongside attacks on our immigrant and LGBTQIA+ neighbors, as symptoms of a deeper problem, one rooted in **access to power and resources**. Let us explain.

The challenge for many is not just affording health care itself, but accessing the **full range of capabilities for health**, including stable housing, wholesome food, reliable transportation, and social support. These essentials are harder and harder

to reach, especially for low-income families. Even those who have historically counted on government support to stay housed, fed, and healthy now find those programs threatened. The implications for health and equity are profound.

As we strive to improve health and close the gaps between those who can and cannot access it, we need to ask: ***Do all people have the resources to lead a healthy life and the power to make critical health-related choices?***

The answer, plainly written in our poor national health outcomes and persistent inequities, is no.

The resulting inequity is experienced as harm, most acutely now by immigrants, women, trans people, and communities of color. And it is not an accident, but rather the result of deeper systems that shape who has the power and resources to lead a healthy life, especially economic resources and social power. Nor are the symptoms benign.



If we understand that **power and resources shape health—and that the health of a nation hinges on them**—then we see that to improve health we have to redistribute power and resources. We have plenty of resources (see: U.S. healthcare spending); the problem is in how we use them.

This kind of re-envisioned strategy is where HealthBegins helps, across providers, payers, and community partners, and in states of every political stripe. As a recent headline in *Fierce Healthcare* notes, “Equity is quality, and quality is bipartisan.” It matters to everyone, as it should.

At HealthBegins, we organize our work into three practice areas, helping clients and partners to:

- **Invest:** Optimize and accelerate upstream investments
- **Integrate:** Strengthen healthcare and social service partnerships
- **Empower:** Build and share power to advance health equity

We approach these opportunities through a multilevel approach, addressing the root causes of ill health and inequity across programs, institutions, community ecosystems, and societal structures. Because to ensure health for all, we have to support it where it begins.

In challenging times, we dig into a practice of disciplined hope. We anchor in history and learn from courageous leaders who have led the progress of the past century. We push against the instinct to retreat from headwinds. We remember that we didn’t get into the fight for equity only for the wins.

Walk with us. Whether you’re receiving consulting services, participating in a program, or using one of our products, we’ll continue to lean into this moment as one marked by discipline, hope, equity, and the opportunity for change.

Best,  
Rishi & Sadena



RISHI MANCHANDA, MD, MPH  
CEO

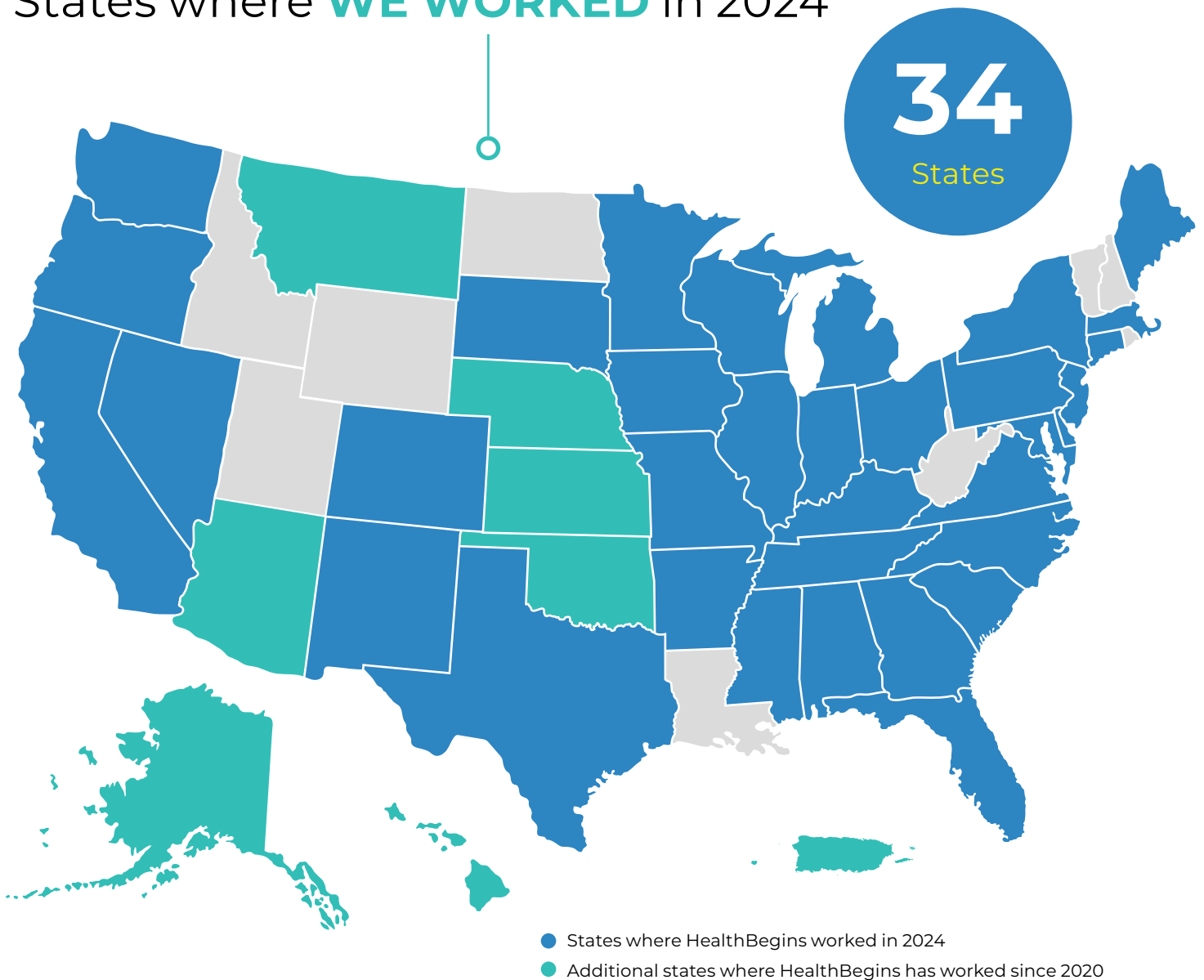


SADENA THEVARAJAH, JD  
MANAGING DIRECTOR

# BY THE NUMBERS

HealthBegins helps Medicaid-serving clients and partners **design, implement, and sustain comprehensive health equity and social needs strategies** in communities across the United States.

States where **WE WORKED** in 2024





**1,213**

Courageous leaders  
supported



**314**

Healthcare organizations  
supported (providers and payers)



**113**

Social-service organizations  
supported



**205**

Communities we helped design &  
implement health-equity strategies



**94%**

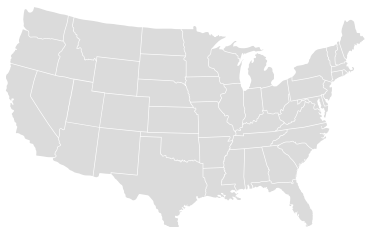
of employees state: "I feel good  
about the ways we contribute to  
the community."



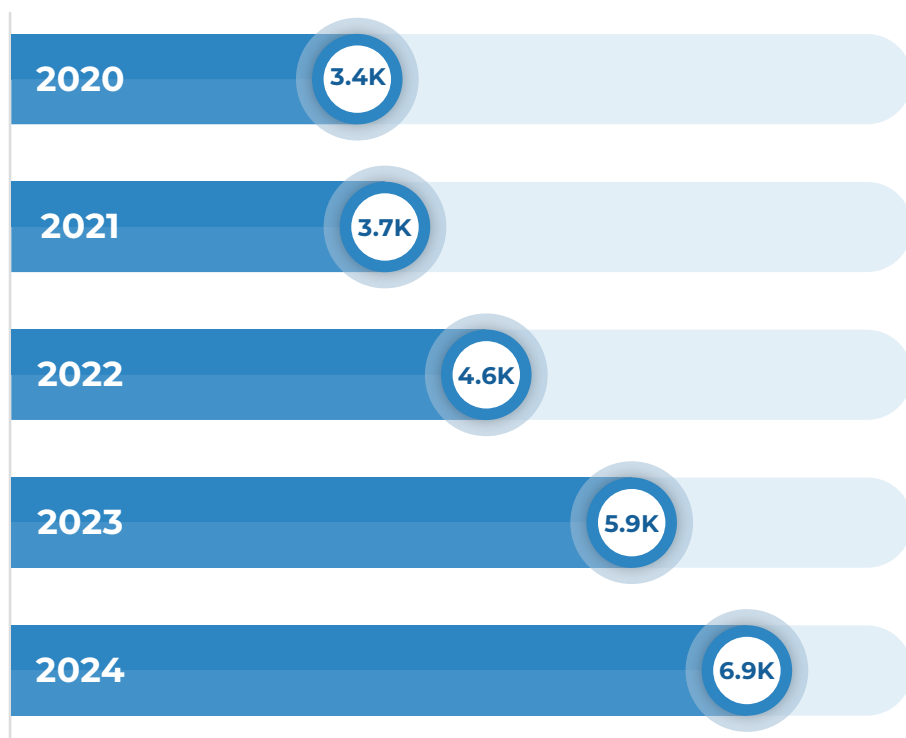
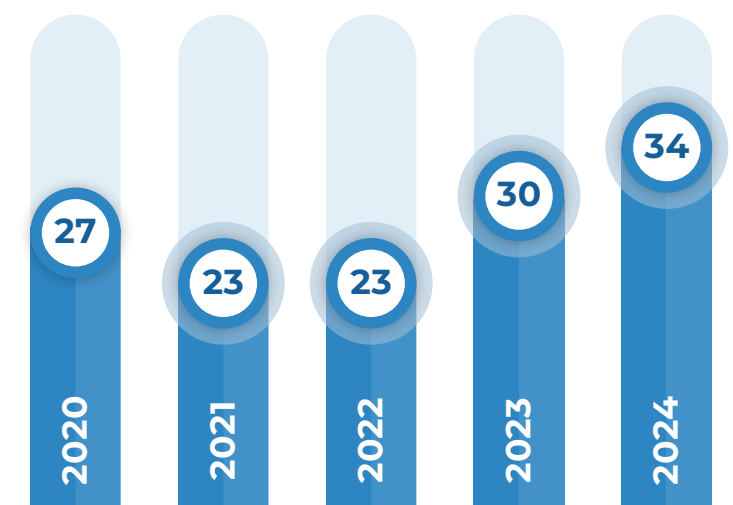
**6,949**

Registrants across  
all webinars

# IMPACT OVER TIME



States where  
HealthBegins **has  
worked**



Webinar  
**registrants**



# 24,702

webinar registrants from  
2020-2024



# 2,827

courageous leaders we've  
supported from 2022-2024



# 314

communities we helped  
design & implement health-  
equity strategies



## VISION

### **We envision a just and equitable future**

in which all people can live their healthiest, most joyful lives possible. To realize this future, health care, public health, community partners, and policymakers will work together in new ways and take bold action to improve the social and structural drivers of health and equity at all levels—for individuals, communities, and society.

## MISSION

### **We inspire and drive radical transformation in health equity**

by equipping healthcare, public health, and community partners to improve the structural and social drivers of health equity. We specialize in helping health care executives accountable for health equity to meet growing state and federal requirements for health equity and social needs, exceed program compliance and performance goals, and achieve long-term impact.

### **We do this by “moving upstream”**

which means helping clients and partners to equitably and effectively integrate health and social care, address individual health-related social needs, improve community-wide social determinants of health, and dismantle deeper structural determinants of health inequity.

## VALUES

Moving upstream is transformational work and must be rooted in core values. In our workplace culture, our client and partner relationships, and our role in the broader Upstream Movement, we seek to uphold these values:

### **+ Equity**

We center our work in racial equity. From the way we show up for our teammates to the way we work with clients and allies, we understand that racial equity is not just an outcome, it's an ongoing practice.

### **+ Growth**

We are committed to growing, as an organization and as individuals. With clients and colleagues alike, we create opportunities for continuous learning, improvement, and professional development. We grow only when we help ourselves, our partners, and our community grow.

### **+ Joy & Hope**

We share joy and practice disciplined hope. We recognize the human suffering caused by health inequities and racial injustice, just as we understand the energy and commitment required to combat them. To nourish and sustain ourselves and our partners in this work, we cultivate a discipline that creates safe, supportive spaces to share joy, setbacks, and hope.



## Our work is informed by key observations:

- Health and social **inequities** are experienced as harm.
- **Social arrangements**, including structural racism, **put some people in harm's way**.
- Equity is not just the absence of harm or unjust differences, it's the presence of **systems that promote and preserve healing, opportunity, and justice**.
- Since structural violence and harm is spatialized, **institutions need a portfolio of strategies** to advance health and social equity that is place-based, outcomes-focused, and works across levels of change.
- **Courageous leaders need support and solidarity** to implement these strategies, and to transform their institutions, relationships, communities and themselves in the process.

# MEET OUR TEAM



**Eva Batalla-Mann, MPH, MSW** | Program Manager

As Program Manager, Eva Batalla-Mann supports community based organizations to navigate healthcare partnerships by leading stakeholder engagement for HealthBegins' Medi-Cal Transformation portfolio and supporting projects related to value on investment for social services. Eva has dual masters degrees in public health and social welfare from UCLA. She has experience working in various areas including arts programming for incarcerated populations, weight stigma in clinical settings, community food justice movements, and support for unhoused communities.



**Alejandra Cabrera, MPH** | Programs Director, Learning & Improvement

In her role as Programs Director, Alejandra Cabrera leads continuous learning and development within our organization and among our partners, focusing on advancing health equity and addressing social determinants of health. She oversees client services, manages projects, fosters innovation, and mentors team members to achieve meaningful change. With a public health background, she brings expertise in client-centered, trauma-informed, and harm-reduction approaches from her work in community-based organizations and healthcare settings. Alejandra excels in building, implementing, and scaling programs that connect individuals to the vital resources they need to thrive, succeed, and live a healthy life.



**Kathryn Jantz, MSW, MPH** | Senior Associate

Kathryn Jantz is the Senior Associate responsible for providing subject matter expertise on Medicaid health related social needs policy, the intersection between food and health, social return on investment for upstream activities, and healthcare-based programs to address social needs. She is a public health policy expert focused on mobilizing the healthcare system to address the structural drivers of health inequity. Kathryn holds a Masters in social work with a focus in clinical practice and a Masters in public health with a focus in health law.



**Ellen Lawton, JD** | Senior Fellow

Ellen Lawton leads training and technical assistance for Kaiser Permanente's Medical-Legal Partnership program. A national expert in the integration of legal professionals into the health care setting to address the social determinants of health, Ellen helped found and then led the National Center for Medical-Legal Partnership at George Washington University from 2001-2020. She is internationally recognized for her leadership in developing the medical-legal partnership model having published leading articles describing this work in clinical and legal journals. She received the Innovations in Legal Services Award from the National Legal Aid and Defender Association and was a member of the Legal Services Corporation's 2019 Opioid Use Task Force. Ellen Lawton leads training and technical assistance for Kaiser Permanente's Medical-Legal Partnership program.



**Barbara Long** | Executive Assistant and Office Manager

As HealthBegins' Executive Assistant and Office Manager, Barbara Long supports the executive team with scheduling, communication, meetings and office management. Barbara obtained a bachelor's degree in communications studies from Cal State University of Long Beach (CSULB) with an emphasis on Interpersonal Communication. In 2015, Barbara was recruited by AltaMed Health Services to join their Strategic Development team. Barbara managed the Foundation's Giving Program that provided resources to community members experiencing food and housing insecurity.



**Dr. Rishi Manchanda, MD, MPH** | CEO

Dr. Rishi Manchanda is CEO at HealthBegins. He has designed and advanced bold strategies to help health care move upstream and advance health equity for historically marginalized patients and communities throughout his career as physician, executive, and public health champion. Dr. Manchanda served as the founding director of social medicine for a network of community health centers in South-Central Los Angeles, as the first lead primary care physician for homeless veterans at the Greater Los Angeles VA, and as the inaugural chief medical officer for a self-insured employer with a large rural agricultural workforce. In his book—*The Upstream Doctors*—and TED Talk, he introduced “Upstreamists,” a new model of healthcare professionals who improve outcomes by addressing the social and structural drivers of health equity—patients' social needs, community-level social determinants of health, and structural determinants of health equity including structural racism.



**Glasha Marcon** | Vice President of Learning and Innovation

Glasha Marcon is an Oakland-based strategist and builder who collaborates across sectors to measurably and equitably improve community health and resilience. Glasha has worked on the frontlines as a Community Health Navigator at an FQHC, built global population health products at Optum, supported startups and the innovation ecosystem in Minneapolis, guided Rally Health’s corporate health equity strategy and initiatives, and led a portfolio of health access and equity products at Nuna Health. Glasha earned her B.A. in International Studies with a focus on Global Health at Macalester College.



**Melissa Meza, MPH** | Programs Director, Medicaid Strategies and Initiatives

In her role as Programs Director, Melissa Meza leads a team dedicated to guiding Medicaid transformation and fostering collaborations across Medicaid managed care plans, state Medicaid agencies, healthcare systems, and social sector nonprofits—supporting the development of business opportunities, ensuring client success and impact, and leading and managing teams across HealthBegins’ Strategy Consulting service line. Holding a Master of public health, she has a robust background in advancing projects that enhance access to equitable healthcare through a multi-disciplinary, community-oriented approach.



**Vincent Pancucci, MPH** | Program Manager

As Program Manager, Vince Pancucci manages HealthBegins’ national learning and improvement initiatives to meet the needs of learners, leaders, and organizations seeking to advance strategic upstream priorities. Through technical assistance, learning collaboratives, and accelerator programs, Vince oversees a variety of equity-focused initiatives—from improving maternal health outcomes to supporting practice transformation. Vince has 15 years of experience in community-based research, engagement, and health policy focused on HIV/AIDS, LGBTQ+ health, substance use, and reproductive health. He holds an MPH in health policy and management from UCLA.



**Tatiana A. Perez, MBA** | Vice President of Business Operations

Tatiana A. Perez is a proven collaborator, organizer, and innovative team-builder with nearly 20 years of experience in the nonprofit and corporate sectors, dedicated to empowering and elevating equity for historically marginalized communities. Previously, she was the inaugural Director of Operations for the AltaMed Institute for Health Equity. She is currently on the board for Proyecto Pastoral at Dolores Mission, a Boyle Heights-based community-building organization working on the east side of Los Angeles. Tatiana holds an MBA and BS in business administration from Cal State LA.



**Grace Rubenstein** | Editorial & Communications Director

Grace Rubenstein is a journalist, editor, and podcast coach specializing in health science. She tells stories through words, sounds, images, and video while maximizing the unique storytelling power of each medium. Grace's award-winning work has appeared in the *Atlantic* online, *New York Times*, *Boston Globe*, *STAT News*, *Longreads*, and the Center for Investigative Reporting (*Reveal*). Her radio tales have reached the airwaves of *Morning Edition*, KQED's *The California Report*, and PRI's *The World*. She is also the story editor of TED podcasts including *WorkLife with Adam Grant*. She earned a BA in psychology from Williams College.



**Navneet Sandhu, MPH** | Program Manager

Navneet Sandhu holds a Master of public health and a Bachelor of Science in biological sciences from California State University, Sacramento (CSUS). Before joining HealthBegins, Navneet worked in a few different programs at the Public Health Institute. Most recently, Navneet helped launch and spearhead the development of a statewide organization engaging community and academic partners in California toward shared policy, training, and practice goals.



**Elisa Santiago** | Business Operations Manager

Elisa Santiago joins HealthBegins as a seasoned operations professional with a diverse background in nonprofit management and client relations. As the Business Operations Manager, Elisa helps identify process gaps and maximizes HealthBegins systems to streamline internal processes. Previously, she was the Client Relations Operations Supervisor at Child360, where she helped improve the quality of classrooms for children ages 0-5. Her strategic direction improved client outreach and engagement while implementing process improvements throughout the organization. Elisa holds a BA in human development from Cal State Northridge.



**Sadena Thevarajah, JD** | Managing Director

Sadena Thevarajah has spent over two decades at the intersection of health law, policy, and stakeholder engagement. She led the first external affairs department at the USC Schaeffer Center for Health Policy and Economics and shaped patient programs at the American Cancer Society. Previously, she served in the Obama Administration, both in the Office of the HHS Secretary as well as in the White House during the passage and early implementation of the Affordable Care Act. She holds a law degree from Washington University School of Law in St. Louis and a public health degree from Johns Hopkins University.



**Vsem Yenovkian** | Communications Manager

Vsem Yenovkian comes to HealthBegins with more than 14 years of marketing and communications experience, including positions at a technology startup and a medical genetic testing company. At these organizations, he focused on developing a comprehensive content marketing strategy designed to raise brand awareness and generate demand. He understands the power of words and is able to connect with an audience on all marketing channels. With this approach he successfully grew the social media outreach and market footprint at each company. Vsem holds a BA in sociology from York University in Toronto.



**Taleen Yepremian, MHA** | Learning and Improvement Program Manager

As Learning and Improvement Program Manager, Taleen Yepremian supports the development and implementation of health equity trainings and tools. Through national learning and improvement initiatives, Taleen works with health systems, health plans, and CBOs to empower leaders and teams to build core competencies and achieve health equity focused goals. Through previous roles, she coordinated various projects and initiatives to improve access to mental health services for underserved youth throughout Los Angeles County. Taleen holds a master's degree in health administration from the University of Southern California.

# How Health Begins

## HELPS

### Health begins **UPSTREAM.**

It flows through social and economic policies, community conditions, institutional practices, and individual social factors that inequitably promote healing or put people in harm's way. This, in turn, shapes the distribution of health and health disparities in our communities and clinics.

We partner with Medicaid-serving providers, payers, agencies, and social sector partners to drive upstream transformation for health equity and justice across individual, institutional, community, and societal levels, through bold strategies, programs, and products.

We do this through three practice areas, helping clients to:

- **Invest:** Optimize and accelerate upstream investments
- **Integrate:** Strengthen healthcare and social service partnerships
- **Empower:** Build and share power to advance health equity

# OPTIMIZE AND ACCELERATE UPSTREAM INVESTMENTS



## Health Care's Challenge

Organizations often face challenges in effectively addressing social drivers of health and equity, leading to persistent inequities and disparities in care and outcomes. Health systems, health plans, and government agencies may lack the data, strategic frameworks, and tools necessary to launch or invest in impactful, equity-focused interventions.



## HealthBegins' Approach

We help organizations develop, assess, and implement a diverse portfolio of strategic, high-impact social needs and health equity investments.

To do this, we:

- **Review, organize, and optimize health equity activities** (see HealthBegins' [Compass for Health Equity Transformation](#)).
- **Design and implement Upstream Quality Improvement initiatives**, programs, and projects for maximum impact with deliberate health equity outcomes in mind (see HealthBegins' [Upstream Strategy Map](#)).
- **Evaluate health equity investments'** economic, financial, and social impacts using HealthBegins tools (see HealthBegins' [ROI calculator](#)).

## FEATURED WORK:

# Helping CBOs make the case for social care integration

Too often, health systems and payers measure the value of health-and-social-care integration efforts solely through their bottom line, in dollars returned through revenue or savings. That's important. But social interventions provide a wealth of other financial and non-financial benefits—to patients, staff, communities, and systems—that help a health system meet its mission. In 2024, HealthBegins led a six-week **value-on-investment (VOI) accelerator** program to help participants from 19 community-based organizations (CBOs) in nine states better articulate the value of their work to health systems.

With coaching from HealthBegins, participants learned how to assess their programs' impact on patient health and well-being, patient satisfaction and engagement, workforce knowledge and satisfaction, fulfillment of regulatory and accreditation requirements, broader impact on equity, and gains accrued to other partners and systems. By the end of the accelerator, participants were able to translate their work through the lens of their healthcare partner's mission and make a better business case for their work.



# 88%

of participants felt they could drive program improvement after participating in the accelerator

“

The VOI, ROI, SROI Accelerator is an exceptional educational tool that offered an interactive experience of connection and learning. It provided invaluable insights and a framework roadmap for developing business plans that demonstrate Value on Investment, Return on Investment (ROI), and most importantly Social Return on Investment [SROI].

**Nadeja Steager**, Executive Director of Community Health Leadership Council San Joaquin

## FEATURED WORK:

# Making sense of the evidence for health equity interventions

Most healthcare organizations don't have the time or resources to properly research and assess which health equity and health-related social needs interventions will have the greatest impact on different inequities and populations. To help them make more informed and impactful investments, HealthBegins and **Elevance Health** launched the **Social Needs Investment Lab**. In November 2024, the lab published its first tool, the [Evidence Assessment Library](#). Each assessment in the online repository includes essential information on evidence supporting the intervention's effectiveness, which outcomes it impacts, and the populations it benefits. In addition, every assessment provides context on the social need addressed, a description of the intervention, and a study-by-study evidence review.

The library empowers healthcare organizations to make informed choices and helps social service organizations better articulate the value of their services. It currently houses four evidence assessments focused on interventions for food access, plus four focused on improving maternal health outcomes. By May 2025, there will be additional evidence assessments on housing, behavioral health, and social isolation, and the library will also include cost assessments for each intervention. To expand its impact in 2025, the Social Needs Investment Lab will host state-level convenings with healthcare and social service providers. HealthBegins will use the assessments to guide and coordinate statewide implementation efforts of social-needs interventions and explore their sustainability.



# 1.4k

views of the Evidence  
Assessment Library in  
its first two weeks

“

By providing actionable insights through the Social Needs Investment Lab, the partnership between Elevance Health and HealthBegins equips healthcare and community leaders with evidence-based tools to address social determinants of health and invest in solutions that enhance population health. Together, we are committed to creating healthier lives and stronger communities by integrating these strategies into the core of our efforts.

**Dr. Shantanu Agrawal**, Chief Health Officer,  
Elevance Health



## Ready-to-use tool: **The Evidence Assessment Library**

[The Social Needs Investment Lab's library](#) currently houses assessments that break down the efficacy and impact of four interventions for food access: food insecurity screening and referral, community health workers for food needs, medically tailored meals, and community gardens.

The Library also includes assessments on interventions focused on improving maternal health outcomes: doula care, maternal and infant home visiting programs, group prenatal care, and maternal health professional implicit bias training.



# STRENGTHEN HEALTH CARE AND SOCIAL SERVICE PARTNERSHIPS



## Health Care's Challenge

Health, government, and community-based organizations often operate in silos. This lack of coordination can lead to health inequities and gaps in care, particularly affecting vulnerable populations with health-related social needs.



## HealthBegins' Approach

We help organizations build equitable, integrated healthcare and social support systems that provide uninterrupted, coordinated, and person-centered care.

To do this, we:

- **Convene diverse stakeholders to build and strengthen relationships** among health, government, and community-based organizations.
- **Redesign care and transform practices** that seamlessly bridge healthcare and social services.
- **Implement Upstream Quality Improvement** initiatives that align and accelerate organizations' efforts to address social drivers of health and equity.

## FEATURED WORK:

# Expanding legal aid's capacity to support health and housing

A core aim of **Kaiser Permanente's Office of Community Health** is to prevent homelessness. For the last three years, HealthBegins and the **National Center for Medical-Legal Partnership (NCMLP)** have helped them tackle that mission by cultivating robust partnerships between the health system and local civil legal aid organizations. Across California, Oregon, Colorado, Maryland, and Georgia, legal teams have helped Kaiser Permanente members improve their housing conditions, access disability benefits and affordable housing programs, and stay housed when their landlords have tried to illegally evict them.

Evaluations showed that when housing problems were detected early in the healthcare setting, it allowed for a lower “dose” of legal help. For example, legal teams could often provide advice in less than five hours to prevent an eviction rather than spending weeks or months in court to stop one. This is better for the individual, more cost-effective for health systems, and expands the capacity of legal aid organizations, offering a vision for how to scale this critical healthy housing intervention.

In 2024, Kaiser Permanente **expanded the initiative's reach** from the clinic to the community by investing in 16 additional legal aid agencies' eviction-prevention work. At the same time, HealthBegins, NCMLP, and Kaiser Permanente created the **Medical-Legal Partnership Learning Lab** to strengthen the capacity of these agencies to work with healthcare partners. Participants identified how their services aligned with their local healthcare partners' priorities. They unpacked healthcare teams' learning styles and experimented with incorporating housing trainings into existing healthcare workflows. And they piloted collecting and messaging data on the impact of upstream legal practice.



# 767

health care, housing, and legal policymakers viewed a [national webinar](#) on what Kaiser Permanente learned from investing in legal aid and how to replicate the program.

“

In our partnership with HealthBegins, Kaiser Permanente is elevating the standard of care for our patients through the Medical-Legal Partnership initiative. With HealthBegins' expert training and support, we're positioning legal aid attorneys within Kaiser Permanente's care teams to connect patients with housing-related legal support in our communities. As a result, our patients have reported greater awareness of their legal rights, increased housing stability, better overall health, and high patient satisfaction.

**Pamela Schwartz**, Executive Director for Community Health at Kaiser Permanente

## FEATURED WORK:

# Enhancing community organizations' capacity to partner with Medicaid managed care

California is pioneering Medi-Cal (Medicaid) transformation through partnerships between Medicaid managed care organizations (MCOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) to improve outcomes and equity by integrating health and social care. HealthBegins plays a critical role in this initiative, known as **California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal (CalAIM)**, as a facilitator of the collaboratives established to convene health care and social care partners to identify and overcome implementation challenges.

Through these collaboratives, CBOs have deepened their understanding of contracting and eligibility requirements. They have also learned from expert faculty and each other how to build strong referral procedures between referring and receiving providers and enhance data management and sharing. This helped dismantle barriers for CBO partners and led to a gradual increase in the number of community organizations contracted to provide services—thereby increasing community members' access to a wider range of services.

Provider participation in these collaboratives **increased by 20% in 2024**, and activities focused on how to increase outreach in local communities to broaden awareness of **Enhanced Care Management and Community Supports services**, deepen collaboration between different service providers and managed care plans, and ensure community residents have access to services. One of the biggest successes was the first in-person resource fair held in Modesto, California. It was attended by more than 100 people, and referrals and inquiries from attendees increased after the event. Through its position on the front lines of this transformative effort, HealthBegins has identified **promising practices that will be published in a guide** in early 2025 to serve as models for Medicaid transformation across the country.



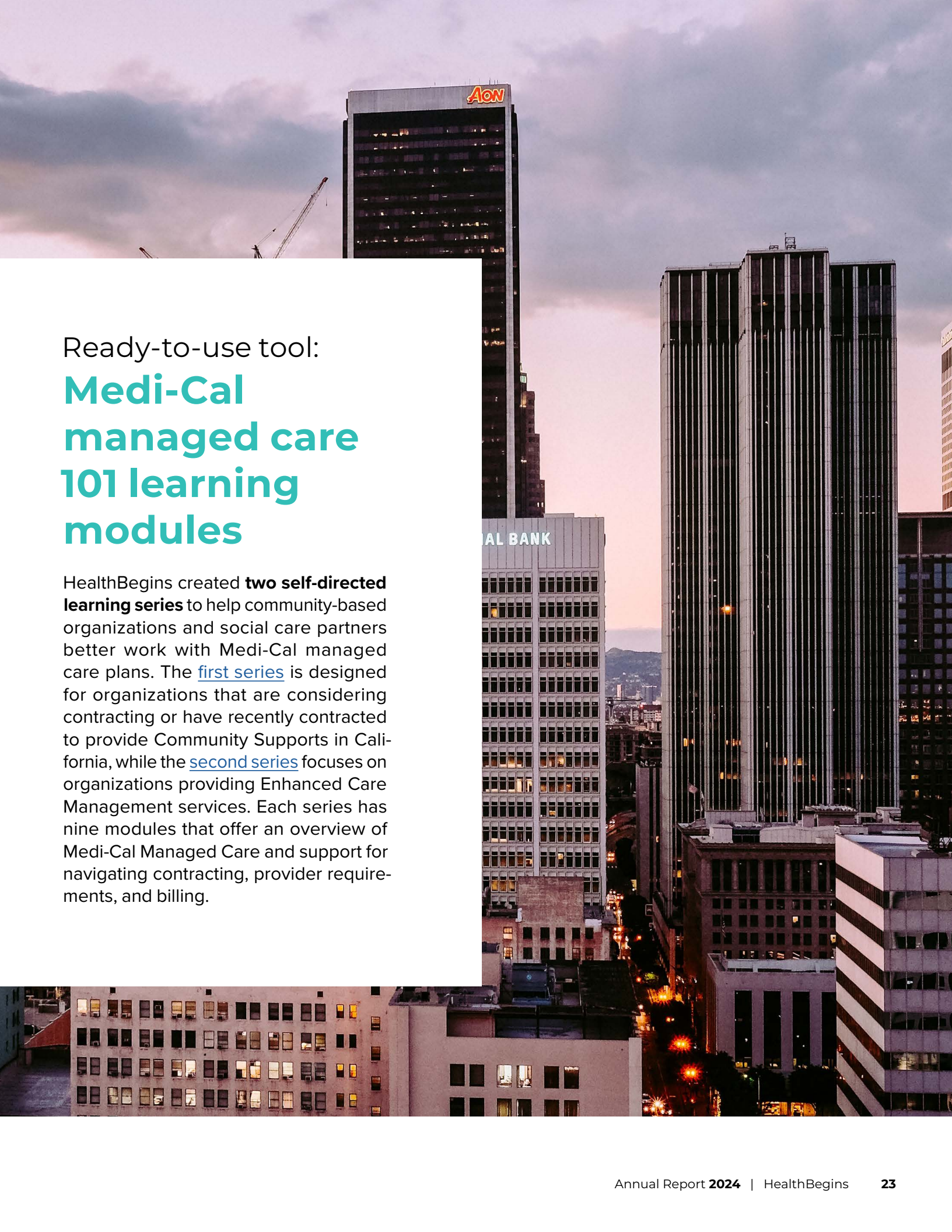
38% → 59%

Community supports utilization rate in San Joaquin County (one of the regions covered in HealthBegins' collaboratives) in Q3 and Q4 of 2024.

“

Participating in CalAIM has created the opportunity to better understand the Medi-Cal Transformation landscape in San Joaquin and Stanislaus regions, and connecting with other providers has been invaluable in helping us to serve more individuals that need healthy meals.

Sara Tindaro, MS, RDN, Community Supports Dietitian, Roots Food Group



Ready-to-use tool:

# Medi-Cal managed care 101 learning modules

HealthBegins created **two self-directed learning series** to help community-based organizations and social care partners better work with Medi-Cal managed care plans. The [first series](#) is designed for organizations that are considering contracting or have recently contracted to provide Community Supports in California, while the [second series](#) focuses on organizations providing Enhanced Care Management services. Each series has nine modules that offer an overview of Medi-Cal Managed Care and support for navigating contracting, provider requirements, and billing.

# BUILD AND SHARE POWER TO ADVANCE HEALTH EQUITY



## Health Care's Challenge

Professionals and stakeholders often lack the tools, influence, and networks necessary to drive systemic change and address the root causes of health inequities. This limitation hampers efforts to implement policies and practices that promote equity.



## HealthBegins' Approach

We equip health equity leaders with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to influence policy, organize for systemic change, and build networks that can be mobilized to drive upstream transformation.

To do this, we:

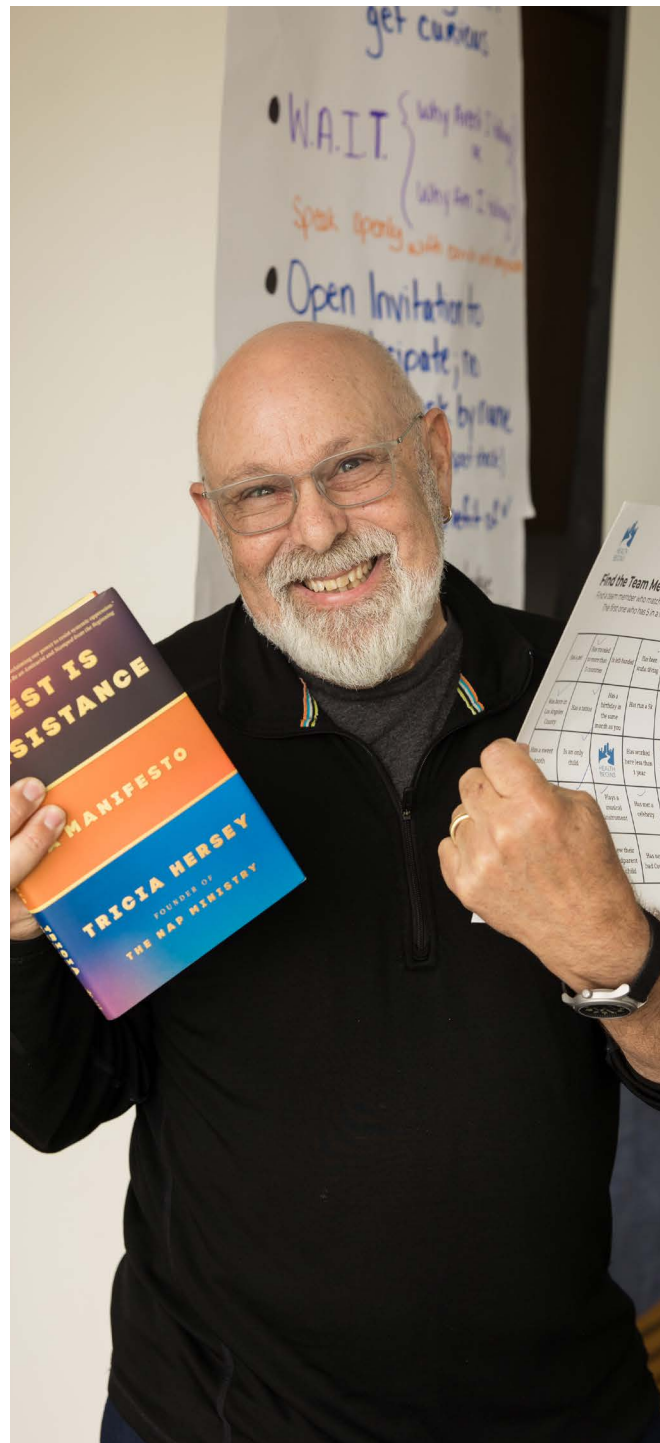
- **Build organizations' internal capacities** to support systemic change.
- **Assist organizations in shaping policies** that address social drivers of health and equity.
- **Facilitate connections** among stakeholders to promote collaborative action.

## FEATURED WORK:

# Mobilizing Medicaid systems to become a key partner in food and nutrition security

In January 2024, HealthBegins and **Share Our Strength** launched the national **Medicaid Food Security Network (MFSN)**. The network supports anti-hunger advocates as they work with state Medicaid programs and Medicaid-serving systems to implement effective strategies that support the food needs of children and families enrolled in Medicaid. During the first year, partners inventoried every Medicaid contract and plan in the country to see how different states address food insecurity through Medicaid. They compiled that information into the [MFSN Dashboard](#), which allows food advocates to sort interventions by state and policy strategy. This vital tool saves advocates time and resources and makes it easier for states to learn from each other and build on promising practices.

In addition to creating tools, the network also awarded grants to four community-based organizations in Georgia, Michigan, Oklahoma, and Virginia to drive transformation. With training and technical assistance from HealthBegins and Share Our Strength, each grantee is partnering with their state's Medicaid agency to strengthen Medicaid's support of food programs. Some grantees are advocating for Medicaid to adopt in lieu of services, while others are working to build linkages between SNAP and Medicaid.



# 156

examples in the MFSN Dashboard show how states address food insecurity for children and families in their Medicaid program.

## FEATURED WORK:

# Building capacity in small independent practices to improve racial health equity



Some of the most culturally responsive, accessible, and cost-effective medical care happens in small, independent practices. But those same practices have limited resources and struggle to stay afloat, let alone collect data and implement programs that improve racial health equity. In 2024, **HealthBegins led a 12-week accelerator program** to equip small primary care practices and **Independent Physician Associations (IPAs)** across Los Angeles County with the resources and best practices to strengthen their efforts to improve race, ethnicity, and primary language (REaL) data collection, and to leverage that data to improve equity-focused primary care improvement efforts.

The accelerator convened staff from four IPAs—Allied Pacific IPA, L.A. Care Health Plan, Angeles IPA, and Omnicare Medical Group—who each oversee and provide training and technical assistance to independent practices. Participants used a self-assessment to review critical organizational capabilities, identify organizational strengths, and prioritize improvement opportunities to advance health equity. They set clear, measurable goals to track and celebrate their progress. Then, with support from expert faculty, they designed and implemented tests of change to meet those goals.

Despite resource constraints on their data infrastructure, staff, and time, **all participants measurably improved four organizational capabilities in just three months.** They strengthened their ability to analyze and identify root causes of identified health inequities and to prioritize, monitor, and stratify measures by REaL data. They also improved their data collection and reporting systems and ability to organize teams that include people who belong to historically marginalized communities.


“

I love the resources that are shared. Our practice has grown and is embracing change for improvement!

Program Participant, Spring 2024 cohort

# 15

test-of-change ideas  
were proposed by  
participants



Ready-to-use tool:

## Election Engagement Guide

Throughout 2024, HealthBegins engaged Upstreamists around the stakes of local, state, and national elections for health equity and provided tools for leaders to take action. HealthBegins' [Election Engagement Guide](#) provides practical, actionable strategies for how to have productive policy conversations and can be used to support efforts around any election or civic engagement. In 2025, HealthBegins is launching a leadership academy to help those committed to health equity become more effective advocates and connect practices in Upstreamist institutions with larger policies. [Sign up](#) to stay informed as the academy begins.

# SOLUTIONS

HealthBegins helps clients strengthen their health-equity investments and partnerships through a set of adaptable solutions—**consulting services, programs, and products**—affording leaders multiple entry points and modes of engagement tailored to their organizations’ needs

## 01. CONSULTING SERVICES

HealthBegins provides health equity subject matter and program management expertise to support leaders through bold change. Whether for short-term coaching or a large-scale, long-term initiative, we work as an extension of your team and bring the structure and support needed to navigate complexity and drive meaningful progress.

### Types of Work:

Partial list

- Needs assessment
- Strategic planning
- 1:1 coaching
- Goal and opportunity definition
- Development of assets
- Stakeholder facilitation or training
- Evaluation system design and monitoring

### Consulting Services Examples:

#### Kaiser Permanente eviction prevention

*(large health-system-driven initiative)*

Multi-year initiative to reduce the health impacts of eviction and housing instability by partnering with local legal aid organizations to launch and support medical-legal partnerships in five Kaiser Permanente markets across the U.S.

#### Medicaid Food Security Network

*(national NGO-driven initiative)*

Collaborative effort by Share Our Strength, HealthBegins, and partner organizations to mobilize Medicaid systems to become a key partner in addressing food and nutrition insecurity.

#### Providing Access and Transforming Health— Collaborative Planning and Implementation

*(large state-driven initiative)*

A critical phase of California’s Medicaid transformation effort to address health-related social needs through Medicaid. HealthBegins facilitates regional collaboratives that convene health care and social care partners to identify and overcome implementation challenges.

#### Data Across Sectors for Health

*(national initiative at local scale):*

Incubator that funds and supports multi-sector coalitions to create data infrastructure to drive improvements in community health. HealthBegins coaches participating organizations to incorporate community member feedback and achieve their goals.



## 02. PROGRAMS

HealthBegins' programs provide practical, cost-effective experiences to help organizations address common needs and challenges in health equity work. These offerings include individual and cohort-based experiential learning that builds skills, shares proven approaches, and accelerates impact. Our programs equip teams with the assets, tools, blueprints, and knowledge needed to implement change efficiently and effectively.

## 03. PRODUCTS

HealthBegins' products enable organizations to achieve specific outcomes independently. These offerings include e-learning courses and web applications built from evidence-based practices and grounded in deep user experience research.

### Program Examples:

#### REaL Data Accelerator

A three-month, online program that equips healthcare professionals to strengthen their collection of race, ethnicity, and language data and leverage it to improve equity-focused primary care improvement efforts.

#### Value-on-Investment Accelerator

A multi-session, structured online program that equips community-based organizations to articulate the value of their services and build sustainable partnerships with healthcare providers.

#### USAgging Community Care Hubs

A three-year USAging Center for Excellence initiative to align health and social care by launching and sustaining 20 Community Care Hubs across the country, for which HealthBegins provides training and technical assistance.

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### Product Examples:

#### Social Needs Investment Lab

Evidence Assessment Library: A partnership between Elevance Health and HealthBegins to [provide evidence assessments and case studies](#) to help stakeholders make sense of the available evidence on health equity and health-related social needs investments.

#### Return on Investment (ROI) Calculator:

A [web-based tool](#), created by HealthBegins with the Commonwealth Fund and the SCAN Foundation, to help CBOs and healthcare organizations plan and develop sustainable partnerships to provide social services to meet health-related social needs.

#### American Medical Association EdHub modules:

Educational [modules](#) created by HealthBegins cover such critical content as structural determinants of health inequity, essentials of population and public health, and community health informatics and social epidemiology.

# FOCUS AREAS

Across our practices and solutions, HealthBegins **cultivates a body of work in five critical realms of social need**. We advance our own expertise in these areas to bring impactful knowledge, skills, and strategies to clients seeking to improve them.

## FOOD JUSTICE ○

Access to nutritious, affordable food directly impacts physical, mental, and economic well-being. Food insecurity disproportionately affects communities of color, contributing to chronic diseases and inequitable health outcomes. And rising food costs have widened the affordability gap, disproportionately affecting low-income households. Ensuring food justice promotes healthier, more resilient populations.

*HealthBegins partners with bold leaders and organizations to create equitable food systems and networks that promote access and affordability.*

## HOUSING JUSTICE ○

Safe, stable, and affordable housing is fundamental to health equity. Housing insecurity and poor living conditions exacerbate stress, chronic illness, and exposure to environmental hazards. Addressing housing injustice reduces health disparities and creates conditions for individuals and families to thrive.

*HealthBegins collaborates with visionary stakeholders to advance housing solutions that can transform communities.*

## CLIMATE JUSTICE ○

Marginalized communities bear the brunt of environmental harm from climate change, including extreme weather, pollution, and displacement. Achieving climate justice requires equitable solutions to reduce harm, build resilience, and ensure that all populations, particularly the most vulnerable, can thrive in a changing environment.

*HealthBegins works with courageous leaders to design equitable climate strategies that protect communities and build a healthier, more sustainable future.*

HealthBegins helps facilitate the **Medicaid Food Security Network**, a national collaborative mobilizing Medicaid systems to address food insecurity.

HealthBegins facilitates regional collaboratives for **PATH CPI**, a part of California's Medicaid transformation initiative, to build health care infrastructure to support housing and other health-related social needs.

HealthBegins co-developed a **climate policy brief**, published in early 2025, that proposes community health needs assessments as a vehicle for institutional action.



## MATERNAL HEALTH ○

Systemic inequities result in higher maternal mortality and morbidity rates among marginalized populations, placing the U.S. highest in maternal mortality rates among high-income countries. Equitable access to quality prenatal and postnatal care is essential to ensure healthy mothers and infants.

*HealthBegins equips healthcare and social-service organizations to apply Upstream Quality Improvement methods and multi-level interventions to make maternal care more equitable and effective.*

## ACCESS TO LEGAL JUSTICE ○

Legal barriers often perpetuate inequitable health outcomes, particularly for populations systematically harmed by societal policies and practices. Ensuring access to justice addresses systemic discrimination and secures rights to health care, housing, and safety, fostering a fairer and healthier society. Medical-legal partnerships demonstrate that addressing legal barriers improves health outcomes and reduces hospital visits by 15-25%.

*HealthBegins supports leaders committed to breaking down legal barriers, advancing policies, and creating pathways to justice for communities historically barred from access.*

HealthBegins supported a **U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration initiative** to help health centers, patients, and communities partner to pilot innovative maternal care models that address health-related social needs. We also shared our multilevel framework broadly in the first webinar in a **CMS Maternal and Infant Health Care Equity series** and a blog post outlining a **strategy map** to improve equity and outcomes.

HealthBegins, the **National Center for Medical-Legal Partnership**, and **Kaiser Permanente** launched a **Medical-Legal Partnership program** to strengthen legal aid agencies' capacity to partner with healthcare providers to prevent evictions.

# THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

*Beyond our work with clients, HealthBegins is committed to advancing health equity across health care and society.*

*We do that by articulating critical ideas and practices—and creating tools and collective actions—that help Upstreamists everywhere learn and engage for impact. We are honored to work both independently and with esteemed partners to further this work.*

***Find highlights of our contributions here.***

## NATIONAL INITIATIVES & LEADERSHIP

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### Medicaid Food Security Network

In February 2024, HealthBegins helped launch the [Medicaid Food Security Network \(MFSN\)](#), a collaborative effort to accelerate the design and adoption of strategies for Medicaid to address widespread food and nutrition insecurity in low-income children and youth. Together with [Benefits Data Trust](#) and [Share Our Strength](#), we created the network to help advocates engage, influence, and partner with state Medicaid programs and Medicaid-serving systems to implement effective strategies to address the full spectrum of families' food needs. The initiative aims to maximize enrollment in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Supplemental Special Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and strengthen networks of local food resources.

### Meharry Medical College

As a founding faculty member and Associate Professor in Meharry Medical College's Department of Political Determinants of Health, Rishi Manchanda brings his extensive expertise in health systems transformation to guide students through the complex landscape of U.S. healthcare policy and social determinants of health. His leadership of this graduate-level course equips future healthcare leaders with a comprehensive understanding of healthcare system evolution, policy development, and the critical intersection of law, ethics, and health equity, while emphasizing practical approaches to addressing healthcare disparities and system-wide transformation.

### Covered California Population Health Investment

Sadena Thevarajah serves on the advisory council of Covered California's Population Health Investment (PopHI) initiative. This Advisory Council is a trusted body of stakeholders and subject matter experts selected by Covered California (the state's health insurance exchange) to support successful deployment of Population Health Investments to improve the quality of healthcare and reduce health disparities for Covered California enrollees.

# PUBLIC TOOLS

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## [From a Patchwork to a Portfolio of Health Equity Investments: The Upstream Strategy Map](#)

Instead of juggling a seemingly disparate patchwork of health equity programs and pilots, leaders need to develop a more cohesive portfolio approach to their health equity investments—one that spans levels of both prevention and intervention. That’s what HealthBegins’ Upstream Strategy Map for Health Equity Transformation helps healthcare organizations and partners do.

## [Health-Related Social Needs in Medicaid: State Checklist for Screening](#)

Social needs screening and follow-up are crucial for identifying and responding to unmet health-related social needs and are often critical components of broader state-level health equity strategies. This tool, developed by the Center for Health Care Strategies in partnership with HealthBegins and the Social Interventions Research and Evaluation Network, outlines decision points for developing or improving screening policies and provides state examples to illustrate implementation.

## [Food for Thought: Medicaid Nutrition Benefit Design Approaches for Equitable Implementation](#)

This brief, developed by the Center for Health Care Strategies (CHCS) in partnership with HealthBegins, offers approaches for Medicaid policymakers to implement or evolve their health-related social needs nutrition strategy. These approaches are based on insights from nine states participating in the Medicaid Health-Related Social Needs Implementation Learning Series, made possible through support from Kaiser Permanente through its National Community Benefit Fund at the East Bay Community Foundation.

## [HealthBegins’ Election Engagement Guide](#)

Through our work at HealthBegins supporting courageous health-equity leaders across the country, we have discovered some helpful starting points to help you open conversations, share information, build shared passion, and encourage action—both for the 2024 election and civic engagements to come. We offer them to you in this concise guide.





## EXTERNAL PUBLICATIONS

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### [Medicaid Food Security Network — Transforming Lives: How Community Health Workers, Promotoras, and Health Representatives Address Food Insecurity](#)

This story serves as a testament to the vital role of Community Health Workers, Promotoras, and Community Health Representatives (CHW/P/Rs) nationwide in addressing food insecurity among children and families.

### [Kaiser Permanente — Housing Help Brings Stability to Patients' Lives](#)

A look at how Kaiser Permanente's medical-legal partnership initiative—launched in collaboration with HealthBegins and the National Center for Medical-Legal Partnership—has helped patients prevent evictions, stay housed, and allow them to better focus on basic health and medical needs.

## WEBINARS

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### [Coding and Co-design: Social Care and Health Care Lessons from the Gravity Project](#)

Gravity Project co-design leaders share critical insights that emerged from the process. Panelists also present lessons about the funding gaps, operational incompatibilities, and relational challenges that can hamper clinical-community partnerships—and how to overcome them.

### [Health, Housing, and Justice: What Kaiser Permanente Learned from Investing in Legal Aid](#)

A landmark medical-legal partnership initiative delivers insights on effective upstream legal interventions, how access to legal assistance can improve health and housing stability, and why healthcare teams integrate legal aid expertise into their patient care efforts.

### [After the Election: What's Next for Health Equity?](#)

Panelists from leading national organizations reflect on the election results and map a way forward for the community of leaders committed to health equity. Together, we identify high priorities across different levels of action—from Medicaid support for health-related social needs to federal and state policy on housing, employment, food, poverty, and more.

## BLOGS

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### [To Build Effective Social-Care Investments, Change the Narrative About Them](#)

The lesson for everyone working at the intersection of health and social care is this: to build sustainable partnerships that effectively address health-related social needs, we need to examine and challenge our underlying perceptions of value.

### [4 Lessons for Collecting Race, Ethnicity, and Primary Language Data](#)

How two small healthcare organizations improved their race, ethnicity, and primary language (REaL) data collection quickly and effectively with the help of HealthBegins' Accelerator program.

### [Catalyzing Change: How Health Net's Quality Improvement Campaign is Addressing Care Gaps in Well-Child Visits](#)

Implementing the HealthBegins community health detailing (CHD) approach, partner CBOs underwent training to drive upstream, equity-focused quality improvements, fostering stronger bonds between clinical providers and community resources.

### [From Anxiety to Action: Responding to a Cruel and Unusual Supreme Court Term](#)

The recent Supreme Court decisions represent a set of structural threats to health safeguards and freedoms for our country and our communities. In this post we focus on the decisions from the Court's recent term, explain their serious health equity implications, and suggest ways for us all to help our institutions and communities respond.

### [How to Think and Work Upstream on Maternal Health](#)

To help women and families thrive, we must go upstream—to care for a woman throughout her whole life, not just during the narrow pregnancy and postpartum windows. To do this upstream work, health systems and insurers must invest in strategies that promote maternal health equity across levels of prevention and levels of intervention.

## NEWSLETTERS

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### [February 2024: An Opportunity to Fight Hunger Through Medicaid](#)

Kathryn Jantz shares with some of her father's central tenets and how they translate into advice for the Medicaid Food Security Network and health equity work broadly.

### [April 2024: Bringing Intentional Investment in Health Equity to a Bigger Scale](#)

Sadena Thevarajah reflects on the principles of Covered California's Population Health Investment (PopHI) initiative. The lesson: not only are piecemeal investments inefficient, they are ultimately unable to meet the scale of the underlying structural issues that keep our communities in poor health.

### [July 2024: Legal Aid: Health Equity's Secret Weapon](#)

Ellen Lawton shares the progress being made in the medical-legal partnership movement and how it is finding new ways of impacting the future of health equity.

### [November 2024: Reflections and Resolutions on the Election](#)

Rishi Manchanda reflects on the outcome of the election with a message of working together to build deliberate solidarity and mobilize our networks to support marginalized communities and people experiencing harm due to social and economic injustices.





HealthBegins is a national design and implementation partner that helps Medicaid-serving clients move upstream and advance health equity for people and communities harmed by societal practices.

Founded in 2012 by physicians and public health experts, we believe that we all can and must take bold action to improve health care and the social and structural conditions that marginalize people and make them sick in the first place. While we are national thought leaders and pioneers in this space, HealthBegins is not a think tank. We are a “learn by doing” operation that helps clients and partners drive continuous improvement, learning, and action at all levels: addressing individual health-related social needs, improving community-wide social determinants of health, and dismantling deeper structural determinants of health inequity.

HealthBegins supports clients and partners with Strategic Planning and Design, Training and Education, and Solution Implementation. True to our mission, we also work with select partners to reimagine, innovate, and scale solutions to address pressing health equity challenges and systemic barriers. Over the years, we have activated and educated thousands of providers, educators, payers, and community partners around the world—and then equipped them to drive upstream radical transformation for health equity.

With headquarters in Los Angeles and employees based in Northern California, Washington, Colorado, and Massachusetts, HealthBegins has helped organizations in over 25 states and supports clients and partners throughout the country.

[healthbegins.org](https://healthbegins.org)

## CONNECT WITH US

The journey upstream requires a strong community, and we'd love for you to be a part of it. Join us online as we shed light on all the important discussions around the Upstream Movement, from social justice to health equity to public health efforts.

Connect with the HealthBegins community on social media or by subscribing to our newsletter:



**Newsletter**



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**@HealthBegins**



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