

## The Economics of Health



Hi, Get Healthy Partners,

I'd like to talk about one of the most important but least discussed factors that shape our health – economic security. To start, let's look at a stark example that clearly shows the relationship between health and economic security in San Mateo County: **19 years**. That's the difference in the average age of death between residents of San Mateo County's most and least wealthy cities. Let that sink in for a moment... people's lives are being cut short by nearly two decades based on their income levels and where they live.

This extreme variation in health by economic conditions is not unique to San Mateo County. Income, wealth, and economic equality have extremely strong links to good health. People tend to be healthier when they have reliable access to the goods, services, and amenities that are necessary for a healthy life. This includes medical care, healthy food, quality housing, and even things like education that help provide opportunities for the future.

Health is shaped by the neighborhoods and cities we live in. Do you have access to good transportation so you can get to your job and earn a living? Does your community provide sidewalks, parks, and trails to get exercise? For many lower-income neighborhoods, the answer is a resounding no.

Limited access to these kinds of resources results in dramatic reductions in both health and life expectancy – the effects of which are long-term and cumulative. **Poverty literally wears away at our bodies, and can even influence our children's and grandchildren's health.**<sup>1 2</sup>

As the economic boom continues in Silicon Valley, many of our residents are experiencing unprecedented economic success. Unfortunately, the rising tide has also left many behind. Incomes in many sectors have not kept up with higher costs of living and soaring housing prices, straining family budgets and making it more difficult to stay healthy. Conditions have been especially hard for many of the county's Black, Pacific Islander, American Indian, and Latino residents.

Over time, we know that economic insecurity can hurt people's health, and eventually send them to our doctors, hospitals, and clinics. **But we also know that this cycle is not inevitable and can be broken.** We can and should play a role in ensuring residents have the resources they need to be healthy.

Get Healthy is working extensively to build the kind of places that provide opportunities for workers and communities to achieve economic security. As we expand our efforts over the next

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<sup>1</sup> Szyf, M. (2015). Nongenetic inheritance and transgenerational epigenetics. *Cell Press*, 21(2). doi: 10.1016/j.molmed.2014.12.004

<sup>2</sup> Loi, M., Del Savio, L., & Stupka, E. (2013) Social Epigenetics and Equality of Opportunity. *Oxford Journals*. 6(2), 142-153. doi 10.1093/phe/pht019

several years, there are still a number of opportunities for action to help build a healthy economy in San Mateo County right now, including:

- **Supporting job training and placement programs** for groups that face barriers to employment such as formerly incarcerated people, low income communities, communities of color, and youth in foster care systems.
- **Advancing wages and benefits** that allow workers and their families to be healthy such as healthcare and childcare benefits, and paid sick days.
- **Increasing access to fair financial services** that do not charge exorbitant rates for loans or processing checks for low-income families and people of color.

I'm excited to work with you on these efforts to improve economic opportunities for all in San Mateo County. Please contact me at: [wdominie@smcgov.org](mailto:wdominie@smcgov.org) with any questions and to get involved. [Start the conversation on Twitter](#) #HealthyEconomySMC.

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