

The California Wellness Foundation

Los Angeles, CA

calwellness.org

@CalWellness



promoting equity, advocacy and access

NCRP: *Why is it important for Cal Wellness to explicitly address the health needs of underserved communities in California?*

CW: Since our founding 25 years ago, we maintain that good health requires more than just access to health care and individuals engaging in healthy habits.

We believe that health is a human right; yet all people do not have the opportunity to enjoy good health and wellness. Why? Because good health requires access to social and economic opportunities; high-quality schooling and schools; safe workplaces and safe neighborhoods with clean water, food and air.

For low-income and underserved communities, these conditions, termed the social determinants of health, are often inadequate and directly lead to poor health outcomes. We are committed to addressing these health disparities by making grants, pursuing policies and partnerships, and raising our voices to make California a place where every person has the opportunity to achieve optimal health and wellness regardless of who they are, where they live, work or play.

Furthermore, we believe in advancing the wellness of communities. Wellness is more than health. Wellness describes healing that encompasses body, mind and spirit and honors the human desire for justice, equity and voice.

NCRP: *How is the foundation's grantmaking based in the social determinants of health different from other approaches to supporting health in our communities?*

CW: We make grants that other health funders might not make because we believe that advancing wellness requires a commitment to social justice. Through



During a 2017 violence prevention summit, panelists Judy Belk, CEO of Cal Wellness, Reverend Samuel Casey (COPE), Marya Bangee, Bamby Salcedo and Suchin Pak stand in front of mural designed by artist and participants during 2015 Enough Summit. Photo courtesy of Cal Wellness.

our grantmaking, we seek to increase access to health care, promote healthy and safe neighborhoods, expand educational opportunities, and improve economic outcomes for underserved communities.

In addition, we believe that how we fund is just as important as what we fund. The majority of our grantmaking is for core operating support. We also fund policy advocacy and civic engagement efforts to build power in communities, ensure community voices are heard, and hold government accountable to the people.

NCRP: *How is the foundation responding to current political efforts to roll back progress on social justice and equity?*

CW: After the November 2016 election, we asked our grantees and community members what they needed given the

divisive political and social climate. In response to what we heard, we organized ourselves to work across programmatic areas and prioritize four key issues: addressing immigrants' needs, protecting access to health care, bolstering the safety net and preventing hate-based violence. Between January and June of 2017, we awarded \$16 million to organizations working on these issues. Plus, through our Advance and Defend campaign, we spoke out on behalf of social justice and health.

We've also committed \$50 million of our endowment to mission-related investing over the next five years and are rolling out initiatives focused on the needs of women of color, specifically reentry into community by formerly incarcerated women and AIDS/HIV/STI prevention.

NCRP: *Given the current political moment, what are the ways that grantmakers like Cal Wellness can exercise leadership and strategic thinking to maximize impact on their communities?*

CW: Fund up-and-coming grassroots and community leaders. Fund advocacy. Give general support. Listen to the people and organizations you fund and develop trusting partnerships – and then go beyond grantmaking. Speak out, work across sectors to build partnerships, and use your dollars for mission and program-related investments. Get your house in order by self-assessing your operations through a DEI lens. Focus on customer service, e.g., get money into the community more quickly and eliminate unnecessary reporting requirements.

There's much to do, and it requires profound commitment and ingenuity to answer what this political moment is calling upon us to do. ■