

Local Policy & Investment Priorities for an Equitable Response & Recovery

Working Draft 10/1/20 – Frequently Updated for a Rolling Recovery

The Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative (BARHII) / Rise Together (RT) is the coalition of the Bay Area’s eleven local public health departments, together with over 200 community-based organizations and agencies, focused on addressing health equity. We have created this policy and investment guide to support local governments across the region in responding to COVID-19 in ways that safeguard the health and economic well-being of everyone who calls the Bay Area home.

COVID-19 has revealed stark inequities in the health and economic security of California’s communities, with particularly alarming disparities in health outcomes by race and ethnicity. These disparities are driven by current inequitable policies and practices and a legacy of historic discrimination, which puts Black, Latinx, Pacific Islander, and other communities impacted by inequities most in harm’s way. For example, the lack of adequate protective measures for many “essential workers”—a population that is disproportionately people of color—has fostered a racial divide between those who can “shelter in place” and those who cannot. These inequities are likely major contributors to California’s recent surge in COVID-19 cases, which brought our state’s economic re-opening process to a standstill and threatens the health of all the state’s residents.

This is a sadly familiar pattern. The Bay Area has experienced many similar systemic failures, including the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and 90s, the Great Recession of 2008, and the ongoing violence against African Americans by law enforcement professionals. These events demonstrate how our governmental response to moments of crisis can differentially shape the health and economic future of distinct communities, with reverberations across our entire region. They also offer lessons to inform our response to the COVID-19 pandemic—guiding us toward equitable approaches that protect those who are most in harm’s way to ensure our collective well-being.

Local Leadership through Wise Policy and Resource Allocation

Local governments across the Bay Area have many opportunities to advance an equitable COVID-19 response and recovery through wise policymaking and resource allocations decisions.

Government agencies can craft local programs to ensure successful implementation of new state and federal laws related to COVID-19—ensuring that all residents can access critical legal protections, social services, and other supports. They can also adopt policies that close critical gaps in our state and federal laws, for example, extending protections to populations that were excluded from federal COVID-19 relief laws or making temporary measures permanent to ensure ongoing protection for recurring crises.

In the months ahead, local jurisdictions will also likely receive new financial resources from federal, state, regional, or local sources to address the COVID-19 pandemic. In many cases, local governments will have substantial discretion in allocating these resources. For example, local governments are currently receiving resources from the \$2.2 trillion federal CARES Act, which must be allocated by the end of year. Another \$1-2 trillion federal package is under consideration and, if approved, local governments will likely receive tens of millions of dollars to invest in local priorities. Similarly, existing funding streams, such as HUD’s Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), local sales tax revenue, and general fund

resources could be harnessed to serve local needs. And many communities across the country are revisiting their law enforcement budgets, making new revenue available to invest in health-focused approaches to improving the safety and well-being of their residents.

BARHII's Integrated Approach to COVID-19 Response and Recovery

Since March, we have garnered the expertise of hundreds of public health professionals and community leaders across the Bay Area to develop our “COVID-19 Rolling Response and Recovery Plan.” This plan is anchored in health equity, economic opportunity, and racial justice. It identifies key solutions that are needed to address the effects of the pandemic and create a future that is equitable and just.

This policy and investment guide builds upon that plan by identifying essential local policy actions and priority areas for local public investment.

We encourage local government leaders to use this guide to inform future policy and resource allocation decisions. This guide can also be used as an accountability tool—to measure whether past policies and resource allocations have aligned with the most pressing needs faced by our region.

We need integrated policies and investments to mitigate the multiple co-occurring crises our communities are experiencing. We therefore recommend that the actions identified in this guide should be considered as a suite of necessary actions—not a menu of options.

Local governments should center the voices of the most impacted by COVID-19 in decisionmaking about the priorities outlined here to ensure local approaches address community needs and build power in disenfranchised communities. This should include prioritization of Black, Latinx, and Pacific Islander communities as well as other groups that experience systemic bias and discrimination, including the unhoused, undocumented, and those with arrest and conviction histories.

We're here to help!

We must come together to create a shared future that is equitable and just. We look forward to partnering with you to implement the policy actions and investments described here to support the communities most impacted by COVID-19 and strengthen our collective well-being. We stand ready to support you in moving these priorities forward in your jurisdiction and connecting with other jurisdictions that are leading the way.

To get help or to learn more about these priorities, please contact BARHII's Executive Director Melissa Jones at mjones@barhii.org.

BARHII Local Policy & Investment Priorities

1) Require Basic Health Protections for Workers

COVID-19 represents a new threat to workers, and data demonstrates that essential employees are facing higher rates of COVID-19. To protect workers and prevent spikes in disease, workers need more extension of health protections while on the job and programs that ensure they can afford to stay home when sick. We also need the public health infrastructure to respond equitably and effectively to this and future crises.

Issue	Policy Recommendation	Investment Priorities
Equitable access to COVID-19 testing, treatments, and vaccines	<p>Appoint Equity Officer and support team into County’s Emergency Operations Center</p> <p>Require disaggregation of COVID-19 health outcome data, especially for Pacific Islanders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Easy and affordable access to testing and treatment → Community-based contact tracing → Wrap-around supportive services for those who test positive (e.g. health services, housing stability)
Sick leave and family care protections	<p>Adopt & enforce local paid sick leave ordinance</p> <p>Establish “paid quarantine” program</p> <p>Establish “right of recall” for laid-off workers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Public “know your rights” education campaign (multi-language, multi-media) → Enforcement of new sick leave protections → Legal aid resources
Enforcement of physical health protections for front-line workers	<p>Adopt strong safety protocol for high-risk industries</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Enforcement and safety trainings at high-risk work sites → Targeted education at high risk sites in partnership with community and workers' organizations → Expansion of data tracking and public disclosure (e.g. employer violations, industries where outbreaks occur)
Robust public health infrastructure for pandemic and disaster response	<p>Embed equity staff and equity practices throughout public health emergency response and recovery process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Long-term investment in Equity Officer and support team for all disaster response → Increased, sustained funding for equity-focused public health infrastructure → Upgraded county public health data systems → Community-based taskforces, comprised of populations most impacted by inequities, tailored to local needs, with compensation for participants

2) Reconnect Families to Resources

People are struggling to feed their families, stay housed, and pay their bills. And yet very few local jurisdictions are offering direct cash assistance—despite evidence that this money protects families and supports the local economy. In addition, new state and federal housing, small business protections, and resource allocations fall short. We must reconnect families to resources so that they can stay healthy and housed, with priority placed on neighborhoods and residents living in communities with high rates of COVID-19 infection and deaths.

Issue	Policy Recommendation	Investment Priority
Sustained financial resources for families	Establish programs for sustained direct cash assistance, accessible to all—including undocumented and reentry residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → “Paid quarantine” initiatives → Guaranteed Income programs, such as those being piloted in San Francisco, Santa Clara, and Alameda Counties
Housing stability and homelessness prevention	<p>Close loopholes in emergency eviction protection laws (expanding just cause for eviction to cover only health and safety concerns, where expiring local moratoria have been preempted by AB 3088, proactively reinstating them to go into effect in January as state protections expire)</p> <p>Adopt “right to counsel” ordinance for all tenants</p> <p>Ensure individuals released from prison / jails transition into stable housing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Legal assistance to tenants → Flexible cash aid / rental subsidies → Public “know your rights” education campaign → Long-term housing support for currently unhoused community members and those transitioning out of incarceration → Coverage of gaps in federal funds that may not support undocumented households → Outreach and education about AB 3088 (eviction protections), AB 1482 (rent cap), and SB 329 (source of income discrimination) through community-based organizations
Inclusive pathways to quality jobs	Establish “right of recall” for laid-off workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Support for social enterprises that help individuals who have traditionally been excluded from the workforce, including formerly incarcerated, unhoused, etc.
Preservation of Small businesses	Provide protections for small commercial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Direct investment in small businesses that serve under-resourced neighborhoods → Legal assistance

in under-resourced neighborhoods	tenants (e.g. lease renegotiation) Adopt “right to counsel” ordinance for small businesses Support local businesses in procurement of government goods and services	→ Rent subsidies → Debt relief programs → Financial incentives to keep workers who have right of recall
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3) Reconnect Communities and Protect Mental Wellness

Staying at home has reminded us about what’s really important. We miss our neighbors, our colleagues, our friends, and our communities. Social isolation has been increasing for years—and so have the impacts of chronic stress on mental wellness. The pandemic has amplified those stressors and added new barriers to connection. We are now facing another impending public health crisis as a result of this pandemic — the increase in cases of major depression, anxiety, grief and trauma.

Now is the time to reconnect our communities and improve mental health—creating a community mental health system that works for all, reinforcing our local non-profit infrastructure that serves those impacted by inequities, enabling equitable online access to a host of essential social services, and more.

Issue	Policy Recommendations	Investment Priorities
Mental health and family well-being	Create community mental health programs for equity communities experiencing high rates of isolation and trauma Establish community-based crisis response teams for mental health 911 calls, with funds shifted from law enforcement budgets	→ Support for community-based organizations that provide mental health services for equity communities
Stability for community-based organizations that serve equity communities	Adopt racial equity focus for CBO support (e.g. shifting funds to CBOs in neighborhoods that have been over-policed or faced under-investment)	→ Rapid relief funds for CBOs that serve Black, Latinx & Pacific Islander and other COVID–impacted communities (e.g. Undocumented, Re-Entry)

	<p>Streamline RFP and contracting processes for CBOs with budgets of under \$500k</p> <p>Initiate cost-saving support initiatives such as space sharing with government and utilizing empty storefronts for CBOs</p>	
<p>Equitable online access to government, learning, health, employment, and interpersonal connection</p>	<p>Ensure all residents have access to affordable and reliable broadband</p> <p>Improve local government virtual engagement protocols and technologies to encourage robust virtual access during and after state of emergency</p>	<p>→ Expansion of broadband access for all residents</p> <p>→ Expanded virtual civic engagement for equity communities</p>
<p>Equitable access to public open spaces</p>	<p>Ensure open space areas are accessible to all communities</p> <p>Prioritize harm reduction interventions in lieu of fines and fees for congregation violations</p>	<p>→ Parks and open space initiatives in most impacted neighborhoods</p> <p>→ Free PPE for all park / public open space attendees</p> <p>→ Educational campaigns on COVID-19 prevention in public spaces</p>

4. Revolutionize the Status Quo To Protect People of Color

We know that chronic stress related to economic and racial oppression, and inequities in our housing and justice systems have had negative impacts on health and life expectancy that predate COVID-19. We also know that climate change and other environmental disasters disproportionately impact communities of color. It's time to treat the housing, homelessness, mass incarceration, and environmental crises with the same urgency we must bring to the fight against COVID-19 to reset decades of lost life that have been known to us for years.

This plank is intentionally bolder and future-thinking. The public health community has been grappling with many of these issues but has not yet found consensus. To fully realize our goal, we must bring together the Bay Area's diverse communities to develop policies, strategies, and programs on the level of the Great Society reforms of the civil rights movement and the New Deal programs of the Great Depression.

Issue	Goal	Policy and Investment Priorities
Ensure full access to democracy	All residents have full and equal access to government planning and decision-making, including authentic public engagement, virtual meeting access, and expanded voting access for all California residents.	<i>For all of these priorities, invest in community-based infrastructure that will be essential to catalyze transformational systems change</i>
Refocus the justice system on health	All people are protected by the justice system, regardless of wealth, race, creed, sex, gender, or immigration status. This includes restorative justice, health protections for incarcerated people, fines and fees elimination, and equitable “decarceration.”	
End income and wealth inequality	All people have enough wealth to meet their needs and live in dignity without wealth-based inequities in access to resources and power. This includes restoring wealth stolen from communities of color during previous recessions and recoveries.	
Transform our housing system	Everyone has access to affordable, healthy, high-quality housing. These changes will end houselessness and racial disparities in housing systems.	
Create a health care system for all	All people have full access to culturally responsive care with equitable outcomes. This includes expanding health care to all Californians and addressing bias in care within our medical systems.	
Community-centered protection from climate change	Urgent action is taken on climate change mitigation and resilience, centered on the communities most impacted by climate change. This includes reducing air pollution, wildfire, and high heat risks and ensure emergency systems prioritize those most vulnerable.	