

Beyond Definitions... Understanding Con Alma Health Foundation's Focus

Understanding Con Alma's focus on certain concepts, requires going beyond definitions. This document provides more insight on key concepts to assist you with your request submission.

Direct Service

Generally refers to services that focus their attention at the individual level. Activities focused on making changes affecting individuals or family unit often involve providing "Direct Services" to those individuals or families—medical care, housing assistance, food, education, etc.

Health

Con Alma defines health broadly to include physical health as well as physical, mental, emotional, behavioral, social, economic, environmental, and spiritual health and well-being. This definition represents an approach to community well-being which impacts local and statewide health systems.

Health Equity

Health equity is the principle underlying a commitment to reduce—and ultimately, eliminate disparities in health, including social determinants. Pursuing health equity means striving for the highest possible standards of health for all people...and giving special attention to the needs of those at greatest risk of poor health, based on social conditions. –Source: Braveman, P. Public Health Reports (2014, Jan-Feb).

Health Equity is the assurance of the conditions for optimal health for all people. –Source: Camara Jones

Health Inequities / Health Disparities

Health inequities are differences in health status and mortality rates across population groups that are systemic, avoidable, unfair, and unjust. –Source: Margaret Whitehead

Health disparities or inequities are those health differences by racial/ethnic group, relation, social economic status, gender, age, mental health, cognitive, sensory, or physical disability, sexual orientation or gender identity, geographic location, or other characteristics historically linked to discrimination or exclusion.

Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) / Social Conditions

Social Determinants of Health (sometimes referred to as social conditions) are the aspects of the environment in which people are born, grow up, live, work, and age, as well as the systems put in place to deal with illness. These aspects are shaped by a wider set of forces such as historical decisions, economics, social policies, and politics, race/ethnicity, socio-economic status and access to opportunities.

Healthcare is only a small part of what REALLY affects our health. The choices we make, our behavior, has a large impact on our health. BUT, the places where we live, work, and play—our social conditions—affect the choices we make. – Source: New Mexico Health Equity Working Group

Systems

Systems may be both intentionally created and evolve organically in response to the needs of communities. Like icebergs, often the visible structural elements of a system rest on a much larger base of less-visible assumptions, practices, and cultural choices. Health care systems can be very complex, and their success is often determined by how well they work together with other systems that affect health.

Systems Change

A "Systems Change" approach addresses the root causes of social problems, which are often intractable and embedded in networks of cause and effect. It is an intentional process designed to fundamentally alter the components and structures that cause the system to behave in a certain way.

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Distinguishing “System Change” from “Direct Service”

It's not always easy to tell whether activities being proposed for funding are “Systems Change” or “Direct Services”—they can look the same, because many of the activities required to bring about systems change also produce change for families and individuals.

Systems and Policy change approaches seek to go beyond programming and into the systems that create the structures in which we work, live and play. Con Alma Health Foundation focuses on changing health systems to better meet the needs of New Mexico's diverse peoples and communities.

Systems change has a strategic basis. Activities focused on systems change often:

- Reflect cross sectors partnerships or involve multiple organizations (requiring collaboration and alignment);
- Address more than one aspect of causes and/or solutions at a time
- Strengthen community capacity
- Target obstacles to health and wellness
- Look to make long-term and sustainable (not temporary) change
- Seek change on a scale large enough to affect multiple communities and groups of people
- Have intentional strategies designed to alter the status quo by shifting functions or structural elements of a system, using purposeful interventions
- Aim to alter underlying structures and the mechanisms that govern how the system operates—which often include policies (regulatory, administrative, etc.), routines, protocols and “best practices”, relationships and power structures, and available resources and values.

In describing the systems or systemic change an Applicant seeks to make, the ‘ask’ is framed in terms of ‘big picture’ and may incorporate components by describing:

- The significance of the change sought (i.e. is it a policy? a regulation? an administrative protocol? an attempt to overcome challenge(s) or address an unmet need? or is the proposed change sought ceasing an opportunity?)
- What the transformative action sought relates to (i.e. a modification, an innovation, an investment in capacity—is it an attempt to modify a practice or something that exists? develop, introduce, or create something new? does it build capacity, competencies, avenues of accessibility?)
- The desired outcome in terms of how it might lead to a systemic improvement, generate a ripple effect, create accessibility, increase engagement, build capacity, etc.

Policy – Policy Change

Policies can be understood as governmental or political (official written documents such as legislative or regulatory policies), managerial (operational, financial or administrative mechanisms) arranged to reach explicit goals. Policies exist, and affect communities and institutions, at many levels. Policies interact with other systems, regulate access (who is served, when, where and to what degree). Policies define problems and solutions—and all of these have effects on the health of people and groups. Changing policies can be an important strategy in implementing reforms and community interventions.

Keep in mind that

- Grant applications that identify and demonstrate an understanding of how one or more policies affect health and demonstrate a strategic focus on changing such policies to better serve those affected, will be very competitive.
- Con Alma does not fund lobbying or other activities prohibited by the Internal Revenue Service. However, such activities are rarely successful unless many other kinds of policy change efforts have already taken place—activities that Con Alma funds. These may include community organizing, statutory or legislative advocacy (building awareness and educating stakeholders and leaders), regulatory or administrative advocacy and more.