

## Overview

# Accelerating Gains in Health through Research

## A FUNDER ROADMAP



The United States leads the world in biomedical research and spends nearly \$5 trillion each year on health care. Yet preventable illness remains widespread, disparities persist, and access to high-quality care is uneven. This disconnect underscores a simple truth: biomedical discovery is just a part of the full spectrum of research needed to achieve better health.

**Health solutions science addresses this gap.** As a broad, interdisciplinary field, it examines how care delivery, policy, and the conditions in which people live and work shape health outcomes. It focuses on what drives health in real-world settings and identifies interventions that improve prevention, care delivery, and equity.

**The value of this approach is already clear.** Health solutions science has contributed to major public health gains, from reducing tobacco use and improving patient safety to lowering childhood lead exposure and informing more effective insurance design. These advances demonstrate that meaningful improvements in health often depend not only on new treatments, but on how systems function, how care is delivered, and how policies are designed.

**Despite its importance, health solutions science remains underrecognized.** Compared to biomedical breakthroughs, its contributions are less visible and often take longer to produce measurable results. Funding is fragmented, pathways to implementation are inconsistent, and many promising interventions stall at the pilot stage. As a result, effective solutions frequently fail to reach the scale needed to improve outcomes nationwide.

**Philanthropy can play a catalytic role.** Unlike government or private markets, philanthropic funders are uniquely positioned to take risks, support long-term change, and invest in areas that lack clear financial returns. They have the opportunity to identify and advance innovative research—while also convening partners across health care, public health, and community sectors to align efforts and accelerate progress.

**Strategic investments in health solutions science can have outsized impact.** By supporting the scaling of proven interventions, strengthening care delivery systems, addressing the social drivers of health, and building the infrastructure needed for implementation and evaluation, philanthropy can help close the gap between knowledge and outcomes. Even relatively modest investments can unlock significant value by improving how existing evidence is applied.

**Improving health in the United States will require more than continued scientific discovery.** It will require a sustained commitment to ensuring that what is known is put into practice—effectively, equitably, and at scale. Health solutions science provides the framework to do so. For philanthropic funders, it represents a high-leverage opportunity to strengthen health systems, reduce disparities, and ensure that research delivers on its promise to improve lives.

Drawing on insights from 18 national symposia, the Pathways for Health Research Collective commissioned a practical framework to guide funders in supporting an essential but underdeveloped field of health research—health solutions science. To learn more, we invite you to read the full Funder Roadmap.



# GUIDANCE FOR FUNDERS

## For identifying projects designed to translate evidence into real-world, lasting improvements in health outcomes

### Organizational attributes

- Demonstrated **leadership engagement** (senior executives visibly championing, co-funding, or embedding research in institutional strategy and holding teams accountable for measurable improvements in outcomes and disparities).
- A **culture of learning** with structures for rapid-cycle testing, transparent data use, and blameless problem-solving.
- Sustainability planning** beyond a single grant (integration into ongoing operations, infrastructure, or policy).
- Capacity building for diverse organizations** (inclusion of minority-serving institutions, community-based groups, and regional hubs, not just well-resourced academic centers).
- Existing cross-sector relationships** or plans to build them (with policy, community, industry, payers, or public health).

### Implementation and evaluation strategies

- Plans to **collect and disaggregate data** by important subgroups to identify who benefits and whether disparities are narrowing.
- Clear use of **implementation science methods** (testing feasibility, scalability, and cost from the start).
- De-implementation strategies** to phase out outdated or ineffective practices that compete with new innovations.
- Plans for **real-world evaluation** (for example, dashboards, rapid trials, real-world evidence, or embedded research approaches).
- Evidence of **linkage between implementation and quantifiable outcomes** such as improved clinical indicators, fewer preventable hospitalizations, or increased life expectancy in target populations.
- Explicit strategies for **scaling and adaptation** across different settings, not just pilot success.
- Plans for evaluating **long-term societal and economic value**, including return on investment or cost savings from improved outcomes.
- Metrics for both **effectiveness and sustainability** (uptake, reach, cost-effectiveness, long-term adoption).

### Community and patient engagement

- Evidence of **patient and community co-design** in setting agendas, selecting outcomes, and governance, with transparent reporting on resulting health improvements.
- Fair **compensation and voting rights** for community partners rather than token advisory roles.
- Use of **trusted intermediaries** (faith leaders, extension services, advocacy groups) to expand reach and relevance.
- Mechanisms for **ongoing feedback loops** (patient-reported data, town halls, advisory councils, transparency on results).

### Diversity considerations

- Involvement of **diverse organizations** (rural providers, nonprofits, startups, regional health collaboratives) in conducting evaluation and implementing effective interventions.
- Strategies to ensure **equitable adoption** (testing and evaluating impact across diverse populations, bias checks in tools like AI).
- Plans to strengthen **local ownership and capacity** so benefits endure in underserved or under-resourced communities.