How does this tool relate to business and finance?
Employers know that the health of their workers—and the spiraling costs of their medical care—are impacted by the places their employees live. Indeed, it’s estimated that employers spend more than $637 billion annually on health care expenses, and that illness-related productivity losses cost U.S. employers more than $323 billion in 2013. Although insurance and access to health care is important, the health of workers—as well as productivity, absenteeism, and individuals capacity to cope with ongoing health conditions—are more heavily influenced by housing, transportation, food security, and social services.

The same conditions also affect the local economy more broadly. Green space, housing, safety, and other amenities draw new businesses, jobs, and work talent to communities and are investment priorities for lenders, community development financial institutions (CDFIs), and philanthropists. Banks, local employers, and hospitals are also increasingly investing in housing and other sectors to fulfill community benefit obligations. Impact investments (e.g., pay for performance) that provide capital to low-to-moderate income (LMI) communities can be good financial investments while also reducing health and social inequities. As an example, a partnership between the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Federal Reserve Bank has brought together community development and public health organizations across the country to explore investments in housing and other sectors that can improve population health. The examples are being catalogued by the Build Healthy Places Network.

But which communities are in greatest need of investment and which conditions in those communities should be prioritized? Although resources exist to study housing markets and other consumer data, there have been few convenient tools for evaluating factors at the local level that are known to predict health outcomes, or for gauging how much they matter to health.

Every Californian should have the opportunity to live a healthy life. The Healthy Places Index is a powerful new tool to make this a reality, allowing professionals in the business and financial sector to make smart investments that can improve community conditions and health outcomes. To learn more, visit HealthyPlacesIndex.org
The California Healthy Places Index, developed by the Public Health Alliance of Southern California, is a new tool that business leaders and investors can use to explore local factors that predict life expectancy. HPI was developed based on input from policy and health equity experts, and provides overall scores as well as detailed data on specific action areas that shape health (see figure 1 above). The website offers other resources that the business and financial sector will find useful, including an interactive online map, graphs, data tables, and a policy guide with practical solutions for improving community conditions.

How can this tool be used by businesses and investors?

The business and financial sector—from the Chamber of Commerce to the local philanthropist—can use HPI alongside input from community residents and workers to set priorities and to map the areas where health needs are greatest. Business interests that span multiple communities or regions of California can use the tool to study the different geographic areas they serve. For example, developers, CDFIs, and other local business organizations can use HPI to identify areas in need of housing improvements or grocery stores, and to prioritize for infrastructure development.

The Healthy Places Index was created in partnership with Virginia Commonwealth University's Center on Society and Health. Learn more about the tool and access the above resources at HealthyPlacesIndex.org