How does this tool relate to residents and community advocates?

Community-based organizations and advocates understand that inequities by race or ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and neighborhood are complex and often entrenched. They reflect both current and historic inequities in education, income, food security, housing costs, transportation access, clean air and water, safety net programs, and more. Likewise, all of these conditions shape opportunity for good health and overall wellbeing.

Community residents and coalitions, community development organizations, neighborhood associations, faith-based organizations, service providers, and state and local foundations press local leaders to pursue policies and programs to reduce health inequities and increase opportunity, but which issues and locations should they prioritize? Until now, 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 community health and wellbeing.

The Healthy Places Index, developed by the Public Health Alliance of Southern California, is a new tool that community organizations and advocates statewide can use to explore local factors that predict life expectancy. HPI was developed based on input from state and local government policy and health equity experts, and provides overall scores as well as detailed data on specific policy action areas that shape health (see figure 1 above). The HPI website offers other resources that advocates and those in a variety of sectors will find useful, including an interactive online map, graphs, data tables, and a policy guide with practical solutions for improving community conditions.

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 community organizations and advocates to diagnose and change community conditions that affect health and wellbeing. To learn more, visit HealthyPlacesIndex.org.
Organizations and advocates committed to reducing inequity, promoting opportunity, and improving health—from local residents to large civil rights organizations—can use the HPI in their work empowering communities to understand and improve the conditions that shape health. More specifically, they can use HPI data in conjunction with resident experiences to understand community needs, and to target their energies to the places and conditions where they will have the greatest impact in improving health and equity. For instance, the Healthy, Equitable, Active Land Use Network in Los Angeles has used the HPI in their strategic plan for targeting community investments.

Community-based organizations can also use the HPI to conduct high-level analysis and produce maps that show health inequities in the communities they serve and use this information to influence policymakers or apply for grants. The multiple levels of data available from a broad set of disciplines can be used to inform the development of campaigns and coalitions. State organizations that span multiple communities or regions of California can use the tool to study the different areas they serve and advocate for increased resources and greater investments in these locations—or suggest that the tool is used to allocate funding and other programs to areas where they will have the greatest impact. For instance, the California Environmental Justice Alliance cited the HPI as a tool for incorporating public health into environmental justice elements of general plans (as required by SB 1000) and for prioritizing communities for programs, policies and funding.

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