Announcing $14.2 Million in Grants and $2.5 Million in Impact Investments

Our latest round of grants promotes community health and supports California’s communities that have been disproportionately harmed by the COVID-19 pandemic and economic instability.

August 16, 2021— The California Wellness Foundation today announced $14.2 million in grants to advance health equity in California by strengthening community violence prevention, promoting economic security in our Black and Brown communities, and implementing systems change. Our grantmaking is supplemented by $2.5 Million in impact investments, which support traditionally underserved entrepreneurs, including women and people of color, as well as businesses that operate in historically underserved communities.

“Many communities of color and low-income communities have been historically denied access to capital and resources. This system of financial discrimination has stunted economic mobility for generations of farmers,” said Judy Delk, Cal Wellness president and CEO. “In addition to our Announcing awards, we will invest millions to help individuals, communities, and cities adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Investing in Community-Led Solutions to Gun Violence

In 2020, California homicides increased by 13 percent, while homicides in rural areas surged by 32 percent. Our partners are not sitting on the sidelines. They want to see more community-led solutions to gun violence. We need better funded violence intervention programs that address the roots of interpersonal violence, poverty, and trauma that fuel gun violence. We need trauma-informed counseling, support services, and job training for our at-risk youth.

In support of communities and particularly Black and Brown communities, which are disproportionately impacted by gun violence, we awarded $10.1 Million to 21 community-based organizations across the state to support violence prevention services for at-risk youth. In particular, the Anti-Violence Coalitions will establish systemic changes across the youth justice system through policies that address the root causes of violence.

The Violence Prevention Research Center at UC Davis will produce and disseminate actionable research on gun prevention efforts in California, while the Sawyer Center will continue its series of reporting projects. “Open and Writ” will investigate news-gathering, news, social and economic justice, and poverty work together to build communities. The reporting will also spotlight innovative solutions to gun violence from communities across California.

Ending/Generational/Cycles of Poverty and Economic Insecurity

As part of our Economic Security and Equity portfolio, this quarter we continued to invest in economic well-being and mobility in our state, particularly focusing on immigrants and people impacted by the criminal justice system. We awarded five grants totaling $8 million to a group of diverse grantees and shared strategies ranging from policy advocacy to leadership development to comprehensive workforce development.

Our five grantees are: Blackout & Breakout, Breathe California, CASP, Time for Change Foundation, and A New Leaf Life-Ready Project. “It’s imperative, for example, to use our grant to mobilize just-released Central Valley residents,” said a prominent policy analyst who has long been involved in advocating for policy change. “We will continue to support the coalition for social justice by helping to build state-wide coalitions of low-income and communities of color in Los Angeles and Contra Costa counties. The goal is to bring more vibrant voices of people who lead and work in those communities.”

Storytelling To Change Hearts, Minds and Public Policy

This quarter, we awarded grants to organizations that are telling their own stories, mentoring narrators, developing counter-narratives and filling up and amplifying voices of people who have traditionally been silenced or ignored. Long-lasting systemic change is not possible without a change in attitudes and beliefs, and the voices of those most affected will be central to these stories.

Four grants totaling $970,000 are supporting storytelling efforts by Defendus, Capital & Main and TOPPANNA. For example, our grant to Defendus will enable them to tell the stories of survivors who have experienced homelessness or are involved in the juvenile justice system. In particular, stories of their success in transitioning to post-secondary education. Furthermore, will apply to help fund independent research and high-quality policy journals that support access to engagement, government, and legislation that advances health equity and creates a safer post-COVID-19 future. A grant to Project Catalyst will help launch a special theme issue of the Health Affairs journal to lift up new research on structural racism in health care.

Investing in the Intersection of Race, Gender and Wealth

This quarter, we awarded $2.8 million in Program-Related Investments (PRIs) that allow us to use our endowment to make low-cost capital available to charities or social enterprises that align with our mission. They are part of our strategy to invest beyond our grant dollars to support the health, safety, and well-being of underserved communities. Our investments target communities of color, particularly those that have been disproportionately impacted by historic underinvestment, unhealthy environments and community violence.

PRIs support the Foundation’s commitment to diversify, equity and inclusion by addressing systemic barriers related to race and gender in the financial sector and to increase the flow of capital to traditionally underserved investment managers and entrepreneurs.

This quarter, we invested $1 million in Don Juan Ventures, a woman-led and diverse early-stage venture capital fund that is investing in entrepreneurism among underserved communities. We also make a $1.5 Million investment in the California Rural Fund, a public-private fund that provides affordable, flexible loans to small businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on businesses operated by people of color. Businesses run by women and people of color suffered disproportionately during the pandemic. Nearly seven in 10 women of color small business owners experienced a decline in revenue, by 40 percent or more. While Black and Latino female founders received just 2.8% of total venture capital investment in 2020. Meanwhile, businesses in majority-white neighborhoods of major California cities received twice the rate of the pandemic-affected program compared to those in majority minority neighborhoods.

As a health funder, our vision has always been a California where every person is able to enjoy health and wellness regardless of their race, class, gender or disability. And our approach has been to remove the barriers that exist for the most need.” said Alan L. Diamonstein, Cal Wellness interim president of programs. “With this round of grants, we continued to follow the leadership, the vision and the solutions proposed by our visionary community partners. In many different and unique powerful ways, they are challenging the root causes of health inequities in our state and we’re honored to support them.”

See the complete list of new grants.

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