

The Fund for Health Equity

In 2021, with transformative support from Mackenzie Scott, Direct Relief launched the Fund for Health Equity, a five-year commitment to advancing more equitable health access and outcomes across the United States. The initial investment catalyzed additional philanthropic support, enabling the Fund to direct more than \$67 million to over 200 organizations working within their communities to address structural and systemic barriers to health and ensure everyone has an equal opportunity to reach their full health potential.

Deeply rooted in the communities they serve, these organizations bring critical knowledge and insights into the social determinants of health—factors like economic stability, education, and social cohesion that shape collective and individual health outcomes. Through their work, they are advancing innovative, locally led approaches to diversify the healthcare workforce, reduce health disparities, and leverage technology to expand access to quality care.

What began as a series of individual, trust-based investments has grown into a nationwide network of changemakers, demonstrating that when community-led solutions are supported and connected, they can take root, grow, and drive lasting change.

Impact at a Glance

\$67M+

invested to advance health equity across the U.S.

2.7M+

people reached through community-led initiatives

200+

organizations supported across all 50 U.S. states and Washington, D.C.

100%

community-led organizations, with leadership rooted in the populations served

≈ 50%

of grantees leveraged the Fund to secure additional funding, amplifying impact

GROWING

A national network of health equity leaders, connected through peer exchange, shared learning, and two Health Equity Summits

GROUNDING IN EXPERTISE

The Advisory Council

From the outset, Direct Relief convened a Fund for Health Equity Advisory Council of nationally recognized leaders in healthcare, public health, and social justice. The Board actively shaped strategic priorities and grantee selection, bringing rigor and accountability to investment decisions and ensuring resources were directed where need was greatest and solutions most credible.



Dr. Regina Benjamin, MD, MBA (Co-Chair)

18th U.S. Surgeon General and Founder of BayouClinic, Inc.



Dr. Byron Scott, MD, MBA (Co-Chair)

Chief Health Officer of Direct Relief



Dr. Martha Dawson, DNP, RN, FACHE, FADLN, FAAN

Associate Professor, University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Nursing



Dr. Jane Delgado, PhD, MS

President and CEO of the National Alliance for Hispanic Health



Gail Small, JD

Head Chief Woman and a citizen of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe

Program Highlights

Behind these numbers are organizations deeply embedded in their communities, each advancing solutions shaped by local knowledge and a commitment to health equity.

Graduates celebrate at an August 2024 ceremony for the Laura Rodriguez Medical Assistant Institute. The program has produced 146 medical assistants since 2023, helping build a pipeline of skilled healthcare workers in the community. (Courtesy of Family Health Centers of San Diego)

BUILDING THE NEXT GENERATION OF HEALTH LEADERS

Expanding Educational Access, Economic Opportunity, and Culturally Competent Care

"This program provides quality access to education. It opens up doors and it is about hope and change. Each of our graduates' lives are changing and I hope this is just the beginning."

Pauline Lucatero, RN, MSN

Chief Academic Administrator,
The Laura Rodriguez Medical Assistant Institute

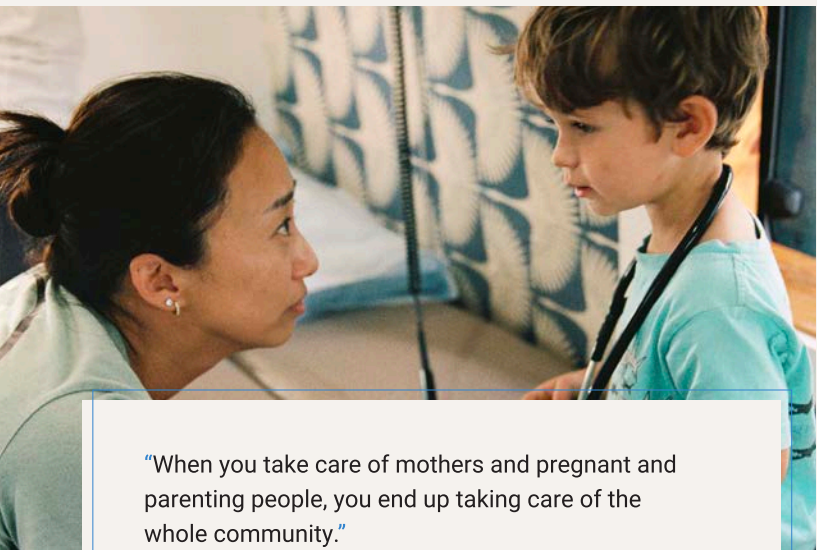
California faces a significant shortage of primary care providers, with nearly one in four residents living in federally designated Primary Care Health Professional Shortage Areas. Driven by an aging population, rising disease burden, workforce burnout, and limited training pipelines, this shortage disproportionately affects low-income and rural communities, widening health disparities.

In San Diego County, Family Health Centers of San Diego (FHCS)—the largest provider of care to low-income, uninsured, and medically underserved populations in the state—has taken a community-based approach to addressing this gap. With \$650,000 in support from the Fund, FHCS launched the Laura Rodriguez Medical Assistant Institute (LRMAI), a medical training program designed to expand access to care by building a sustainable workforce pipeline of allied health professionals rooted in the communities they serve.

Since 2023, LRMAI has graduated 146 medical assistants, three-quarters of whom have been hired by FHCS, expanding clinical capacity while promoting economic mobility and strengthening access to culturally competent care.

STRENGTHENING CARE FOR MOTHERS AND BABIES

An Integrated, Community-Based Model of Care



"When you take care of mothers and pregnant and parenting people, you end up taking care of the whole community."

Sunny Chen, RN, MBA

Chief Executive Officer, Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies

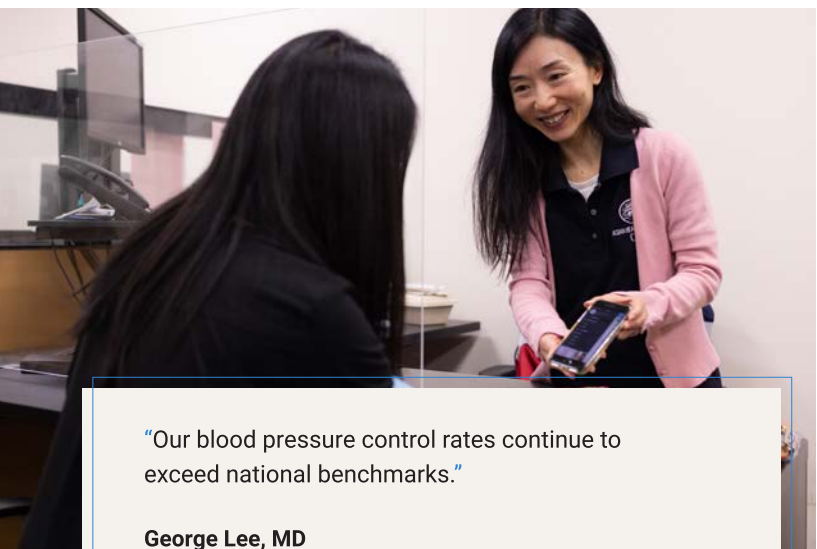
In Hawai'i, significant racial and ethnic disparities persist in maternal and infant health outcomes, reflecting longstanding inequities in access and quality of care.

Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies (HMHB) addresses these inequities by expanding access to high-quality, culturally congruent care for communities experiencing the greatest access barriers. Through its mobile Mana Mama program, the organization helps overcome challenges such as childcare needs and geographic isolation by delivering clinical services—such as prenatal care, lactation support, and perinatal mental health services—alongside wraparound supports, directly to patients. Complementing its mobile services, HMHB also operates three clinics in Hawai'i, Maui, and O'ahu and maintains a strong referral network, with more than half of patients reached through collaborations with local community health centers and other nonprofit providers.

With \$870,000 in support from the Fund, HMHB has expanded its mobile clinical services, launched a 24/7 telehealth platform, and scaled its workforce and clinical capacity, enabling the organization to reach more than 60,000 people. Fund support also helped HMHB to secure additional investments, including from the Hawai'i State Department of Health, strengthening the long-term sustainability of its community-based care model. During the devastating 2023 fires in Lahaina and this year's catastrophic flooding, the organization served as a frontline responder, demonstrating the critical role of community-based providers in both everyday care and times of crisis.

INNOVATING FOR EQUITABLE ACCESS

Advancing Remote Monitoring and Multilingual Care



"Our blood pressure control rates continue to exceed national benchmarks."

George Lee, MD

Chief Innovation Officer, Asian Health Services

As health systems increasingly rely on telehealth, longstanding language and digital literacy barriers are amplified, putting older adults, patients with limited English proficiency, and those with low tech literacy at risk of being left behind. In Alameda County, one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse regions in the U.S., these challenges are especially pronounced, disproportionately affecting Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities who comprise over 30 percent of the population.

Asian Health Services, a Federally Qualified Health Center serving 26,000 patients across Alameda, is closing this digital divide. With \$630,000 from the Fund, the organization launched a culturally and linguistically tailored remote care model for patients with uncontrolled hypertension and congestive heart failure (CHF), equipping them with smart monitoring devices and support from Digital Health Advocates. Integrated with patients' electronic medical records, the model enables real-time data sharing and monitoring.

The results are striking: 90% of hypertensive patients achieved improved blood pressure readings, with findings published in Health Equity Journal, and CHF patient engagement reached 85%. The program is now integrated into ongoing chronic disease management workflows at Asian Health Services, establishing a durable and scalable model of remote, team-based care.

BEYOND THE GRANT

Catalyzing Action Across Communities

Some of the Fund's most significant outcomes extend well beyond the programs funded. In Seattle, a grantee used Fund support to advance traditional medicine practices, establishing a proof of concept that helped secure state Medicaid reimbursement, creating durable policy change. In California, a Fund-supported partner identified that pregnant farmworkers lacked the legal protections needed to reduce physical labor in late pregnancy, ultimately helping connect them with legal advocates to secure workplace accommodations. And when disaster struck Native Alaskan communities following Typhoon Halong, an existing grantee relationship gave Direct Relief an immediate, trusted link to communities in crisis. These examples illustrate how investments in community-rooted organizations create value far beyond any single program outcome.

LOOKING FORWARD

Advancing the Next Phase of Health Equity

Over the past five years, the Fund has demonstrated that community-rooted organizations play an essential role in advancing health equity. These organizations are best positioned to understand local barriers to care and develop solutions that are responsive, trusted, and sustainable. Building on this momentum, Direct Relief is launching Health Equity 2.0, a new three-year initiative focused on expanding access to care and strengthening the healthcare workforce in underserved communities, with an initial \$10 million investment of Direct Relief's own funding.

Direct Relief will officially announce Health Equity 2.0 during the Health Equity Summit this November. The event—the second of its kind—marks a milestone not just for Health Equity 2.0, but for the broader network the Fund has built. Over five years, what began as individual grants has grown into a connected ecosystem of more than 200 organizations spanning all 50 states—the Summit is the connective hub of this community of practice.

We invite your team to join us from November 15-18 to see firsthand how these investments are helping communities build stronger, more equitable, and more resilient systems of care.



Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies,
a Fund for Health Equity grantee,
delivers essential supplies to
families affected by the March
2026 flooding in Hawai'i.
(Megan Batson/Direct Relief)



With Deep Gratitude

The Fund for Health Equity was made possible through the extraordinary generosity of MacKenzie Scott and her team, whose landmark support anchors this work. We are also deeply grateful to the Abbvie Foundation, Eli Lilly and Company, and the many generous philanthropic donors, whose contributions helped bring this vision to life.

The trust placed in Direct Relief enabled a level of scale, stability, and strategic flexibility rarely available in health equity funding. We are honored to have stewarded this investment and deeply grateful to see it take root in a growing network of changemakers driving sustained impact locally and nationwide.