

NORTHWEST HEALTH FOUNDATION

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Northwest Health Foundation Awards Grants to Improve Health Among Communities of Color *Local organizations receive \$600,000 to influence local health policy*

PORTLAND, Ore. — Northwest Health Foundation has awarded \$600,000 in grants to seven local initiatives that aim to improve health equity in Multnomah County.

The grants are part of the Convergence Partnership Fund, a collaborative effort that is funded by the national Healthy Eating, Active Living (HEAL) Convergence Partnership. Local grantmakers, including Northwest Health Foundation, Kaiser Permanente Northwest, CareOregon, the Bullitt Foundation, the Oregon Community Foundation, United Way of the Columbia-Willamette, and Meyer Memorial Trust provided matching funds for the Convergence Partnership Fund.

The program is designed to improve opportunities for healthy eating and active living within communities of color in the area.

“Our region has been called out for being a ‘uniquely toxic’ environment for communities of color,” said Nichole Maher, executive director of the Native American Youth and Family Center and Northwest Health Foundation board member. “We’re pleased to partner with local and national organizations to make real improvements in health equity.” Maher also served as an advisor on the Convergence Partnership Fund.

While the selected programs seek to improve the health of communities of color in different ways — from investing in a mobile produce truck that delivers fruits and vegetables in underserved communities to establishing a 25-acre park in northeast Portland — the paths they’ll take to achieve those goals are similar. Community organizing and policy advocacy will play major roles in each grantee’s plan.

“These projects focus on communities that need better access to healthy foods and environments that support physical activity,” said Chris Kabel, program officer at the Northwest Health Foundation. “Land use, transportation and food systems policies are all powerful levers to improve community health.”

“Embedded opportunities for health within a community play a powerful role in determining outcomes such as diabetes and heart disease,” Kabel said. “Convergence grantees — all of whom represent communities of color — will work to ensure that these opportunities are more equitably distributed.”

The following organizations received funding through the Convergence Partnership Fund:

Verde received \$150,000 to educate, organize, and mobilize low-income residents of the Cully neighborhood in northeast Portland, with the ultimate goal of convincing the City of Portland to include the 25-acre Thomas Cully Park in its Capital Improvement Plan. The grant will also help Verde establish a plan to fund the park and ensure that environmental education opportunities are created for youth in the neighborhood.

Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) received \$150,000 to improve the safety of several neighborhoods in outer southeast Portland by advocating for new sidewalks, streetlights, and bike lanes. IRCO will use funding to train community leaders, deepen expertise about how to influence relevant policies, and mobilize community advocacy to ensure greater opportunities for healthy living and environmental sustainability.

Urban League of Portland will use their \$140,000 grant to embed health equity objectives in several local and regional policy frameworks — including the Portland Plan, Metro’s Regional Transportation Plan, and the Portland and Gresham Transportation System Plans — to improve neighborhood infrastructure for low-income communities of color.

Latino Network received \$50,000 to build on their history of leadership development and civic engagement among Spanish-speaking community members in the Portland-Gresham area. They will engage will community members to determine priorities for improving access to healthy food and opportunities for physical activity. Funding will also enable Latino Network to advocate for health equity in schools and neighborhoods.

African Women’s Coalition will use a \$10,000 grant to begin the process of establishing community gardens and increasing access to familiar fruits and vegetables for African immigrants and refugees in Portland.

Portland Community Reinvestment Initiative (PCRI) received \$50,000 to build partnerships, conduct research, and develop an action plan to improve nutritional options within low-income communities of color in north and northeast Portland. Ultimately, PCRI plans to establish community gardens in these communities and develop a framework for a mobile produce truck to deliver fruits and vegetables to community members.

Organizing People, Activating Leaders (OPAL) Environmental Justice Oregon received a \$50,000 grant to build on its experience advocating for more equitable distribution of healthier transportation options for communities of color. OPAL will use the funding to expand its community engagement, leadership development, and partnerships to influence specific public policy, such as TriMet’s Transit Investment Plan and Metro’s Regional Transportation Plan.

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The mission of the Northwest Health Foundation is to advance, support, and promote the health of the people in Oregon and southwest Washington. The foundation invests in efforts that address the root causes of health through community-driven solutions and seeks to ensure that the voices of all people are represented in health policy discussions. Northwest Health Foundation focuses its work in three areas: public health, health care reform, and health workforce. More information can be found at www.nwhf.org.