

Better Health Through Better Collaboration

**Minnesota Healthy Communities Conference 2013:
Building on What Works**

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Thank you, Paul, for the introduction.

My remarks today will be about what the Federal Reserve brings to the table in terms of promoting healthy communities. To give away my punch line right away: The Federal Reserve's community development function is grounded in a long tradition of fostering and building collaboration. For a variety of reasons, I see this culture of networking as being especially useful in the endeavor of promoting healthy communities. My remarks today represent my own views and are not necessarily those of anyone else in the Federal Reserve System.

The Minneapolis Fed's community development activities help support the economic growth of low- and moderate-income communities in the region we serve. However, we do not work directly with these communities. Instead, the Bank, as an intermediary, works in partnership with other organizations to further its goals. Traditionally, our partners have included community development organizations, financial institutions and government agencies that support economic growth, small business development and neighborhood stabilization. And, when the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation reached out to the Federal Reserve System in 2010 to address some of the health challenges that low- and moderate-income communities face, we became acquainted with an entire field of promising new partners: those who work in health and human services.

In this way, the Federal Reserve's community development function is all about networking, collaboration and partnership-building. I see this tradition as one that will make us especially effective in the promotion of healthy communities. As you all know, there are many factors that correlate with individual health outcomes—factors such as education, employment, housing, transportation and financial access. Because these factors are inextricably linked, successful promotion of health requires comprehensive solutions. And we can only arrive at these comprehensive solutions by working together across sectors.

It is easy to come up with concrete examples of how the Minneapolis Fed's community development function is helping to fill this need. Most prominently, as Paul mentioned in his opening remarks, we held a conference last year to promote greater collaboration between community development and health practitioners. In the year since our conference, the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis has continued to engage community leaders across the Ninth District in conversations that highlight the need for cross-sector engagement. Let me give two examples of that engagement.

During a recent visit to La Crosse, Wisconsin, Minneapolis Fed Community Development staff convened a group of nonprofit and local government leaders to discuss anticipated impacts of the Affordable Care Act. While the new health

care legislation was viewed as a positive step toward increasing access to care for low-income households, several organizations expressed concern about the increased costs associated with record-keeping, the need to reduce staff hours and the assumed difficulty of retaining part-time employees without employer health benefits. Community leaders agreed that a greater exchange of information between the health sector and other sectors was needed in order to make informed decisions about organizational operations and to ensure a smooth transition.

Our Community Development staff also recently traveled to Helena, Montana, to learn more about the obstacles limiting access to nutritional foods across the state.

In Helena, at a meeting facilitated by the Minneapolis Fed, business, education, local government and nonprofit leaders discussed the challenges that food suppliers face, which included high fuel and transportation costs, limited storage facilities and inadequate food-processing infrastructure. Community leaders identified potential solutions to address these issues, but agreed that greater collaboration across sectors was needed in order to implement them.

So, there is a need for cross-sector solutions.

Arriving at those solutions will take increased communication among practitioners working on the ground—across sectors, across geographies and even across agencies. As you listen to the insights of your colleagues in the room today, I encourage you to contemplate new and unconventional opportunities to build relationships and to share information. Listen not only for those options to assist and build your own projects, but also for those opportunities where your experience can help another community as well. Let me be clear, though: I applaud you for your collaborative efforts to date. I am delighted, too, that the members of the Minneapolis Fed’s community development function have been able to play such a key role in fostering this collaboration. Delighted—but not surprised. After all, as I described earlier, collaboration is really the essence of the Fed’s community development culture. I know that I speak for Dorothy, Ela and the rest of our group when I say that we very much look forward to leveraging our culture in helping you build the kinds of partnerships and collaboration that we will need in order to better promote healthy communities.

Thank you for your attention, and good luck with the rest of your day.