

# Strategic Plan and Process

2024-2028

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**For the first time in 25 years, the Foundation has changed its vision, mission and values to better represent a bold new direction.** The five-year strategic plan lays the groundwork for our future. A future where we are committed to being a Foundation that leads with racial equity as our north star, and one that partners with community at every level to deliver trust-centered philanthropy that drives impact in the areas of greatest need. We begin that journey with three priority areas identified by Howard County residents. These priority areas aim to not only meet immediate physical, social and emotional health needs, but also build capacity and momentum for long-term change.

## OUR VISION

*A Howard County free from systemic inequities, where all people can live abundant and healthy lives.*

## OUR MISSION

*To work side-by-side with community to build power, advocate for policy change and dismantle structural racism to achieve better health for everyone in Howard County and greater Maryland.*

## STRATEGIC PRIORITY AREAS

### 1. Demand an Equitable Health Care System

Our current health care system is built upon long-standing structural inequities that we have yet to solve. Issues around cost, affordability and access to care contribute to inequities. We saw these inequities most starkly during the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to increased death rates for our communities of color.

People of color are less likely to have health insurance, more likely to face cost-related barriers to getting care and more likely to incur medical debt. Many Black, Hispanic and Asian residents contend with bias, prejudice and discrimination when dealing with providers that lead to delays in diagnosis and treatment and lower-value or suboptimal care. Often, for Black women, this leads to maternal and infant mortality and a failure to receive respectful maternity care. And, mental health needs based on years of chronic stress and trauma are often criminalized and/or inappropriately recognized and treated.

*We promise to:*

**INCREASE** access to compassionate and affordable health and mental health care.

**IMPROVE** the health of birthing people and their children from preconception through postnatal time periods.

**UNCOVER AND DISMANTLE** structural racism negatively impacting health care coverage and delivery.

## 2. Increase Affordability and Build Wealth

For many residents, it can be difficult to live in Howard County. Our county has a high cost of living, and wealth is vastly and unequally distributed across the county. In particular, Black and Brown residents have a fraction of the wealth of White households, leaving them in precarious financial situations when a crisis strikes and with fewer economic opportunities overall. The persistent wealth gap is not an accident but rather the result of centuries of inequitable policies and practices in housing, labor markets, credit markets and retirement systems, among others, that have failed Black and Brown communities.

We seek to make it more affordable to live and thrive in Howard County and to accumulate wealth. Two of the most expensive monthly budget items for many of our residents include housing and food. Expanding the wealth-building capacity of property ownership and offering affordable, high quality rental housing will help eliminate entrenched racial inequity within our community. Access to affordable, nutritious foods are more limited in communities of color and low-income communities in Howard County. Increasing access to healthy food is and decreasing the abundance of food swamps – or areas where less healthy food and drinks dominate – can help us reduce inequities and improve health for all.

Structural racism prevents residents from attaining their highest level of health and consequently affects the health of our entire community. We seek to help dismantle and reverse policies that have created hurdles for residents of color to build, maintain and pass on wealth. We recognize these will be longer-term solutions that may take several years to develop, test and scale.

### *We promise to:*

**REMOVE** barriers to obtaining and sustaining affordable, high-quality rental housing and home ownership.

**ENSURE** food and nutrition security by increasing access to affordable healthy food and drink options.

**BUILD** long-term, generational wealth in communities of color to close the racial disparity gap in wealth attainment.

## 3. Dismantle Structural Racism through Community Building

The Foundation promises to work side-by-side with community to build power, advocate for policy change and dismantle structural racism to achieve better health for everyone in Howard County and greater Maryland. We cannot do this work alone. We value our community partners and grantees and believe they can make big change happen.

We recognize that this type of systemic change takes time and we seek to work with partners to build the base, create policy wins and catalyze sustained movements. We also pledge to support our community partners and grantees in doing this work through technical assistance that they deem important. Past grantees have found equity coaching, organizing training and insights on internal organizational equity journeys' impactful.

Finally, we need to adjust our community’s dominant narratives. For example, some suggest Howard County is post-racial or colorblind, but this view impedes our equity goals because it incorrectly frames how the public understand problems, their root causes and therefore what solutions should be considered. There is a mismatch between the ideals and visions of Howard County and what the reality is for many residents of color. We seek to challenge harmful narratives through communications campaigns and by working with other allied institutional leaders and partners.

**We promise to:**

**FORM** close and trusting relationships with grantees.

**FUND** community organizations that want to connect, organize and advocate for policy change.

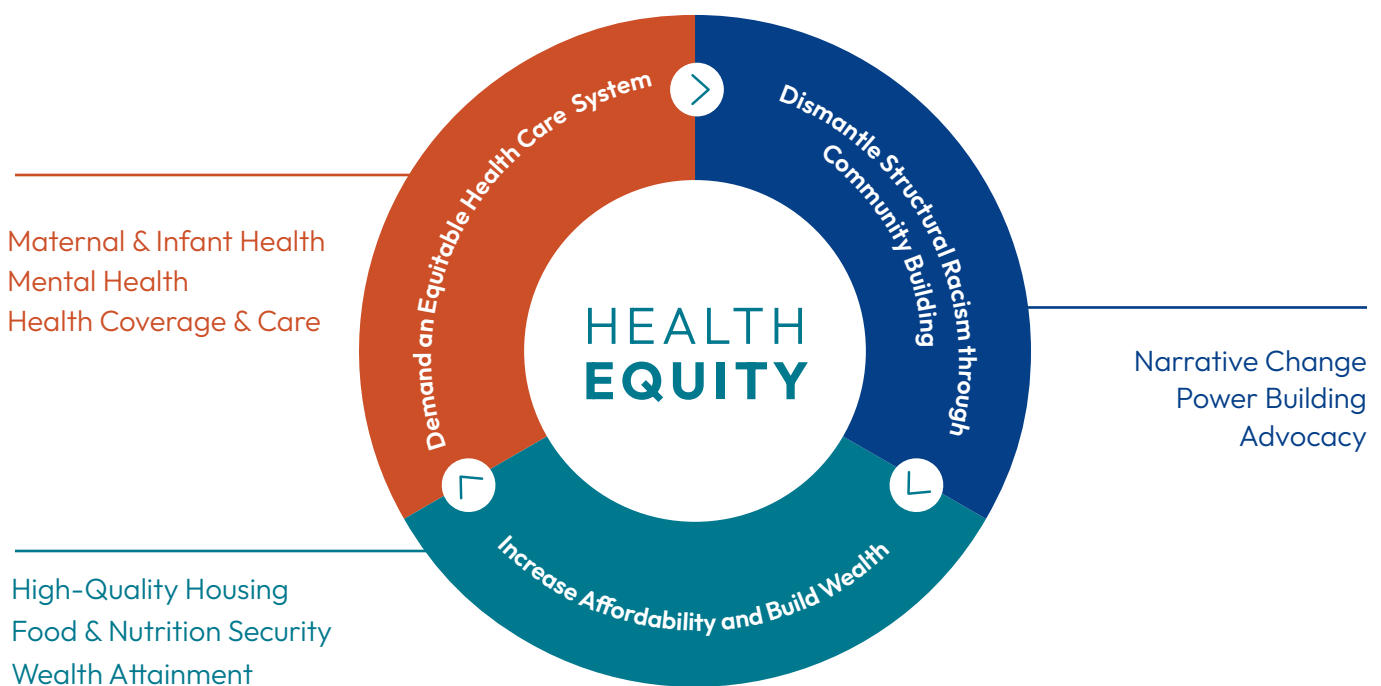
**LINK** grantees through communities of practice to learn and exchange ideas.

**OFFER** technical assistance in areas uplifted by our grantees.

**CHALLENGE** dominant narratives through communications campaigns and allied partnerships.

**THE WHOLE IS GREATER THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS**

None of these strategic priorities stand alone. They are interconnected and interrelated on every level and working on one priority inevitably touches each of the others. Residents experiencing health inequities and daily challenges are whole individuals, and we acknowledge their experiences are not segmented. The Foundation commits to working on each of these priority areas, understanding that our work will ebb and flow and interconnect along the journey to provide whole scale change.



## VALUES

Underneath all this work are our values – the principles that give us purpose and direction. We believe these values guide the way we aspire to act and show up in our community, and provide a way for our community to hold us accountable. **To this end, we promise to be:**

### IMPACTFUL

WE ACT WITH INTENTIONALITY AND DRAW UPON LIVED EXPERIENCE, RESEARCH AND DATA TO DRIVE POSITIVE HEALTH OUTCOMES IN OUR COMMUNITY.

### TRUSTWORTHY

WE WORK TO EARN TRUST BY BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH SINCERITY AND VULNERABILITY.

### ANTI-RACIST

WE CHALLENGE AND TRANSFORM POLICIES, BEHAVIORS AND BELIEFS THAT PERPETUATE SYSTEMIC RACISM AND OTHER INTERSECTING FORMS OF OPPRESSION.

### COURAGEOUS

WE ACKNOWLEDGE AND USE OUR PRIVILEGE TO INFLUENCE OTHERS, DISPEL HARMFUL NARRATIVES AND DEMAND CHANGE.

### CATALYTIC

WE BUILD AND SHARE POWER TO FOSTER COALITIONS THAT ADVANCE HEALTH EQUITY.

## STRATEGIC PLAN PROCESS

The Foundation has and always will believe that health is a fundamental right, and that everyone should have a fair and just opportunity to attain their highest level of health. We believe in valuing everyone in our community equally but acknowledge that health inequities exist because of historical and contemporary injustices built into our health, economic and social systems.

*To achieve health equity, we must change the systems and policies that have resulted in generational injustices. By reducing health inequities, we believe all people will be able to live abundant and healthy lives.*

To be most effective, we will partner with the community to push policy and systems-level changes that will have far-reaching, long-term impact.

Given this understanding, over the last several years, **the Foundation has worked deeply to embed equity across our organization – in our relationships with the community, our grantmaking approach and our internal culture.** This strategic planning process proved to be much different than previous ones – with deeper and more inclusive community engagement, an expanded, community-inclusive decision-making table and a more intentional inquiry into how to center anti-racism and trust-based philanthropy. We sought input from a broad cross-section of the community, including residents most impacted by health inequities and frequently excluded from decision-making. We expanded Horizon’s strategic planning body to include both Trustees and community members. And we pushed current grantees, partners and community leaders to embrace a new and equitable vision of the future.

*In developing the plan, the Foundation captured a breadth of input and centered community voices often unheard and systematically excluded to better understand the greatest challenges to living and thriving in Howard County. By expanding the membership of our strategic planning body to include half Trustees and half community members, we co-designed with community to create the plan.*

## THE JOURNEY: CENTERING COMMUNITY VOICE

**Throughout 2023 we engaged 2,600 people** and intentionally included grantees, community-based organizational leaders, policymakers, community members across the socio-economic spectrum and community members of color to better understand their barriers to living a long, healthy life. We also worked with new research partners, led by, and often staffed by, people of color with deep experience in community engagement. Our partners wanted to get a sense of residents’ needs and challenges, and the results highlighted common ground across the county, as well as nuances between populations.

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## By The Numbers

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**104**  
INTERVIEWS

OF COMMUNITY AND  
INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERS

**98**

LISTENING SESSIONS

FROM SPANISH-SPEAKING,  
LATINO COMMUNITY MEMBERS

**400**

POLL RESPONSES

BY PHONE,  
TEXT AND INTERNET

**300+**

COMMUNITY SUMMIT

ATTENDEES FROM  
ACROSS HOWARD COUNTY

**1,700**  
DOORS

KNOCKED ON ACROSS  
THE COUNTY



**WHAT  
DID WE  
HEAR?**

**THAT THESE THINGS MATTER. AND THEY MATTER A LOT.**

- Mental health
- Culturally competent health care
- Racism
- Housing access & affordability
- Health care and insurance access & affordability
- Immigration status support
- Wealth attainment
- Job availability, quality and wages
- Transportation

Responses from across our multiple data sources consistently mentioned Howard County residents' ability to afford basic needs and trouble in accessing needed and culturally competent health care. Furthermore, many respondents spoke to the intersection of these challenges – for example, for many people whose jobs do not pay enough, it is difficult to access housing that is affordable and/or that offers decent living conditions. And always being worried about debt leads to excess stress and mental health concerns.

As several respondents noted, the pervasive and intergenerational impacts of systemic racism compound these challenges. This is also the case for many immigrant families, who face systems, policies and social attitudes that work against them.

Although not all issues made it into the final plan, further details on research findings can be found at <https://hchealthfoundation.org/strategic-planning/>.

## THE JOURNEY: SHARED DECISION-MAKING

The Horizon Foundation’s strategic planning processes are led by the Planning and Evaluation (P&E) Committee, a subcommittee of the Board of Trustees. Historically, the P&E Committee was mostly made up of Foundation trustees and long-standing institutional community partners. For this process, Horizon expanded the P&E Committee to include 50% board members and 50% residents with personal and/or deep connections to communities impacted by systemic inequities. To model the fair and just policies and practices we advocate, we compensated them for their participation.

### The 2023 P&E Committee members included:

Jorge Benavides  
Patricia Fisher  
Rhonda Holbrook  
Jumel Howard  
Jalisa McKnight  
Sri Sridhara

Matthew Vaughn-Smith  
Luis Vivanco  
Jonathan Ahn  
Yvonne Commodore-Mensah  
Chris Fortune  
Brian Hepburn

Nikki Highsmith Vernick  
Sharon Hoover  
Celián Valero-Colón  
Lanlan Xu



The P&E Committee met monthly between February and September of 2023. Members prioritized building familiarity and trust before jumping into strategic planning. It quickly became clear that the relationships forged through this Committee would endure and help ground the Foundation throughout this process and beyond.

This approach led to a strategy more rooted in community needs and opportunities. It fostered deep and mutually nourishing relationships with community members. It lifted data and stories that shaped the final plan. It provided the Foundation with a clearly articulated and agreed-upon direction that represented the community. And it resulted in a strategic plan well-positioned to create both short-term outcomes and long-term, systemic change.

Given the success of this redesigned P&E Committee and the strength of the relationships built through the process, the current members have committed to continuing to meet through 2024 to oversee implementation and metric development.



## LOOKING AHEAD: GRANTMAKING

We recognize that the Foundation must look internally and think about how we can reimagine our grant making practices to be more inclusive and trust-centered. We recognize that grantmaking has inherent power dynamics and we seek to change those and build more collaborative relationships with our grantees that allow for greater risk-taking, learning and ultimately more equitable and impactful results.

### We pledge to:

- Invest time upfront in a discovery phase of work with grantees to strengthen relationships, align on roles and identify joint commitments.
- Provide opportunities for longer term, unrestricted operating grants to allow for more innovation, emergent action and sustainability.
- Consider different and more accessible types of grant applications.
- Simplify and streamline grant reporting to focus on dialogue, learning and mutual accountability.
- Use videos and storytelling to capture grantee journey and impact.

## LOOKING AHEAD: COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY

Our strategic plan represents the work the Horizon Foundation will undertake over the next five years. It will be a significant investment in the community and in the health and wellbeing of our residents. Our plan is also a work in progress. Recognizing that we have committed to working on several complex strategic priority areas, we will phase the work to focus resources on different priorities at different stages over the course of the five-year plan. This will ensure there is sufficient capacity – among staff and grantee partners – to achieve our shared goals.

The Foundation will continue to work side-by-side with community and respond to issues and areas of greatest need.

### *To honor this intention, we commit to:*

**RESPOND TO COMMUNITY INPUT:** Host a series of community conversations and meetings to announce the plan, capture feedback and continue to refine strategies to pursue the plan goals.

**CO-DESIGN:** Work together with community organizations, residents and leaders to develop and execute impactful interventions as co-equal partners.

**PLAY THE LONG GAME:** While this strategic plan will be a roadmap for the next five years, the Foundation acknowledges that these are complex issues that will take time to address and acknowledge that we will need to work on these areas for many years.

**REMAIN AGILE:** Adapt and evolve the plan to ensure our mission is achieved.



## GRATITUDE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Horizon Foundation wishes to thank its staff, board and community partners for engaging in this process to develop the 2024-2028 strategic plan. This plan is responsive, co-created and well-positioned to work toward a Howard County free from systemic inequities, where all people can live abundant and healthy lives.

### **We would also like to thank our research partners, including:**

C.O. Communications  
Groundwork Partners  
HIT Strategies  
Ignited Strategies  
Strategies for Change Group

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David Wolf  
Lanlan Xu

### *Most of all, we would like to thank the Howard County community —*

the non-profits, community and faith institutions, businesses, leaders and residents that make us who we are and who we hope to become. Thank you for thoughtfully engaging with us and this process over the last year and a half. We look forward to working together to realize this vision for our shared future in the years to come.