Developmental Origins Strategy Collaborative:  
A Collaborative for Lasting Change

Our mission is rooted in the clear and compelling science that tells us that the healthiest communities are those characterized by higher nutritional status, family financial stability, strong social networks, and low levels of “toxic stress” associated with social disadvantage. We now know through the science of developmental origins of health and disease (DOHaD) that the vulnerability for chronic and other diseases, both physical and mental, are “programmed” into human biology much earlier than we thought. This programming is a result of nutritional and social stressors experienced by the mother prior to conception and through the first thousand days to about age two. These stressors have the power to establish the biology for lifelong prospects for health and social success.

While the mother is obviously the environment of the developing fetus, the community is the environment of the mother. A recent Robert Wood Johnson Foundation national commission concluded that our zip code may be more important than our genetic code in determining our health. The implications of this are remarkable. For example, public health practitioners know that nutrition and stress risk factors can be lessened through our community environment and social connections, in effect our zip code. This has tremendous potential for targeting change because these conditions – the community environment and social connections - can be improved through innovative community-based programming and changes in public policy.

Our vision is a community designed for health and wellbeing where all individuals are supported in reaching their potential. It will take a lot to make this happen and our part is pretty significant. We need to raise the nutritional level of the entire community by making sure that affordable, healthful food is widely available. This food must be consistent with the cultural traditions of the various groups in the community. We also need to find systems level levers to reduce the presence and impacts of disease-generating “toxic” stress caused by interlocking systems of oppression that lead to institutional racism, financial deprivation, lack of opportunity, lack of access to resources and an intergenerational, disadvantaged position in society. We want to do this, in part, by creating opportunities for community engagement, economic development, and building of social capital with primary goals to:

1. Increase the nutrient level of the entire community by expanding the availability of affordable, healthful food that is consistent with cultural traditions.
2. Support and generate strong and resilient community networks so that when high stress occurs there is increased support for people coping with the stress.
3. Increase economic stability and opportunities for jobs, training and increased social capital for families.

We are doing this by building the Developmental Origins Strategy Collaborative. This collaborative provides an expanded network resulting in increased project partnerships, opportunities, collaboration and alignment; shared expertise and technical assistance to encourage comprehensive, multi-sector project planning and advocacy; deeper analysis of what works through identified and shared metrics that indicate changes in key health outcomes and access to evaluation services; and conducting outreach, education and training activities, translating the science in order to make the information accessible to communities most impacted.

Through the co-creation of projects, we will create, build, expand and accelerate opportunities to build social capital, expand economic development, and increase access to healthful foods in disadvantaged communities. Further we aim to build stronger community networks to provide support to those who are most affected by systemic, structural inequities.

Our basic idea and underlying principles have generated a great deal of interest. There are many settings and many partners linked in this effort and, to this point, we have been successful in incorporating collaboration and participation from grassroots organizations up to the state legislature. This broad based level of participation has given rise to a diversity of strategies. Using a collective impact perspective, we will work with

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collaborative members to think beyond their primary methods of delivery in order to create a portfolio of efforts that can link and leverage the change efforts of others. Through this, we aim to contribute to the growing social justice movements that seek to build the human and social capital of our communities to enhance prosperity and good health for all.

Universities and Institutions:
- Institute for Sustainable Solutions, Portland State University
- Center for Public Health Studies, Portland State University
- Moore Institute for Nutrition and Wellness, Oregon Health and Sciences University
- Center for Women’s Health, Oregon Health and Sciences University

Community and Economic Development:
- Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO)
- Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, Food, Farms and Faith
- Ecotrust
- Friends of Zenger Farm
- Albina Community Bank
- Rose Community Development Center
- Oregon Food Bank

Community Health:
- Wallace Medical Concern Community Health Clinic
- Multnomah County Maternal and Child Health
- Multnomah County Health Department
- Pathways Project

Early Childhood Development:
- United Way of the Columbia-Willamette
- Children’s Institute

Systems Change Making:
- Kellogg Foundations, Best Babies Zone
- Oregon Solutions, Portland State University
- Kaiser Permanente Community Benefit
- Care Oregon