

Philanthropy's Declaration of Interdependence

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The 20th and 21st centuries have featured remarkable responses to address considerable public health challenges, ranging from greater control of infectious diseases to improvements in motor vehicle safety, to name a few. These achievements were ushered in by a series of societal and economic circumstances that altered the way in which organizations address public health challenges, bringing together government with health philanthropy and the private sector.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

Harnessing the power of these different voices to drive improvements in population-based health involves high-stake and high-reward collaboration, something that is at the heart of our public-private partnership practice at the CDC Foundation. The CDC Foundation, created by Congress in the 1990s, works to bring together the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) world-class scientists with key corporate and philanthropic leaders and organizations. For the CDC Foundation, it is indeed a privilege to represent CDC, which serves as the U.S. health protection agency and is consistently rated by the public as the most respected federal agency. Whether health threats are chronic or acute, man-made or natural, human error or deliberate attack, global or domestic, CDC works 24/7 saving lives and protecting people from these threats to ensure a more secure nation.

In its work, the CDC Foundation operates at the nexus of government, the private sector, and civil society. At one point in our nation's history, these three entities could afford to operate independently, but today it is an uphill battle for any of these groups to achieve their missions working alone. Since the CDC Foundation's inception, our organization has worked to continuously improve our public-private partnership practice, striving to learn lessons from both successes and setbacks in pursuit of improved health in this country and around the world.

LESSONS FROM SMALLPOX SUCCESSES

Importantly, some of these lessons were informed by the earlier work of public health giants such as Dr. William Foege, CDC's director from 1977-1983 and founding board member of the CDC Foundation. While credited with many public health successes, Dr. Foege may be best known for his leadership as a member of a global coalition working to

eradicate smallpox, which is hailed as one of the greatest public health achievements in human history.

Smallpox had plagued the human condition for more than 2,000 years, even playing a role in U.S. history, striking our troops during the Revolutionary War and later afflicting President Lincoln shortly after his Gettysburg Address. In the 1960s and 1970s, a small group of CDC experts led by Dr. Foege and a cadre of World Health Organization counterparts formulated a strategy with a single objective: to rid the world of the smallpox virus forever.

Beginning in Africa and then moving through India, Dr. Foege and his colleagues developed key alliances with ministries of health, district clinics, thousands of health workers, village chiefs, missionaries, and others to conduct disease tracking, reporting, and measurement, also known as disease surveillance. Dr. Foege's strategy focused on containing the virus by vaccinating the perimeters of areas where it was present, in essence creating a fire line around the virus to reduce transmissibility.

These smallpox warriors used the coalitions they established to reach the remotest areas, eventually achieving full eradication of this centuries-old plague in 1979.

In his book *House on Fire: The Fight to Eradicate Smallpox*, Dr. Foege provides fascinating detail into how the smallpox virus was defeated, including insights and lessons learned from working in coalitions. These lessons are artfully illustrated, almost in primer form, for those of us who are practitioners of public health and health philanthropy.

In the CDC Foundation's 18 years of building more than 700 successful public-private partnerships, we have come to realize the continuing wisdom of many of Dr. Foege's lessons. We paraphrase (and in some cases restate) a sampling of these below:

- **Coalitions are powerful.** Satisfaction must come from achievement of shared outcomes instead of individual accomplishments.
- **Communicate to stay connected.** Ongoing communication is essential—it is the nervous system of successful coalitions.
- **Seek the truth.** In order to form an effective response to a public health problem, you must use data to get to the truth.

- **Be optimistic.** Optimism, according to Dr. Foege, played a key role in the success of the enterprise—look for reasons to say “yes” to the possibilities.
- **Build trust.** It is the glue that holds teams together.
- **Spend time to improve tools and techniques.** Troubleshoot and remediate issues until you get it right.
- **Find effective leaders.** Leaders must dedicate themselves to the mission, use new information to improve the strategy, and build coalitions.

USING COALITIONS TO MULTIPLY IMPACT

Of course others, such as Terrance Keenan, long-time special assistant to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, have trumpeted the value of coalitions. He wrote that “a great Foundation builds investment partnerships around its goals, creating coalitions of funders—public and private—to multiply its impact.” While the CDC Foundation has broadly embraced this tenet for many years, we have put it into action more recently as a value proposition in two public health collaborations: the Safe Injection Practices Coalition (SIPC) and the Viral Hepatitis Action Coalition (VHAC).

The SIPC is a partnership of more than 15 health care-related organizations, patient advocacy groups, industry partners, and other public health partners led by CDC and based at the CDC Foundation that was formed to promote safe injection practices in all U.S. health care settings. More than 150,000 patients have suffered through the consequences of unsafe injection practices in the last decade. This coalition developed the One & Only Campaign—a public health education and awareness effort—aimed at both health care providers and patients to advance and promote safe injection practices.

VHAC is a public-private partnership developed by the CDC Foundation to help CDC make meaningful advances in the prevention, screening, and treatment of viral hepatitis. The 19-member coalition helps support crucial CDC-led research and programs, amplifying CDC’s messages to the public to increase overall awareness about the widespread and under-recognized problem of viral hepatitis.

Through these two efforts, the CDC Foundation has learned additional lessons on coalition building and management. These include:

- Demand clarity and focus around mission.
- Establish effective governance early with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
- Ensure that desired outcomes inform all activities, especially at the genesis.
- Encourage active participation of all partners and stakeholders while establishing guidelines for partner engagement.

- Emphasize a formalized external communications strategy.
- Centralize accounting and reporting.
- Ensure consistent monitoring and evaluation.
- Formalize growth and/or exit strategies.
- Understand and address technical, medical, and potential political aspects or hindrances for the work.

CAPITALIZE ON INTERDEPENDENCE

At the CDC Foundation, we know that global and domestic networks that drive innovation and prosperity thrive on collaboration and trust. High-stakes collaboration is becoming the new currency that both public sector and private sector organizations must utilize. Organizations that can link and leverage their strengths with those of other organizations will outperform and outserve those that do not. In a resource-deficient environment, the ability to work interdependently in the health philanthropy arena and with stakeholders serves as a model to grantees and partners, providing more effectively aligned interests and more impactful outcomes for those being served.

Together let us hold tight to the ancient proverb instructing that if you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go further, go together.

Established by Congress, the CDC Foundation helps CDC do more, faster, by forging public-private partnerships to support CDC’s work 24/7 to save lives and protect people from health and safety threats. The CDC Foundation currently manages more than 200 CDC-led programs in the United States and in 58 countries around the world. Since 1995 the CDC Foundation has launched more than 700 programs and raised \$400 million to advance the life-saving work of CDC. For more information, visit www.cdcfoundation.org.

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