



Rhode Island's Health Equity Zones

A Model for Building
Healthy, Resilient
Communities





Photo credit: Elijah Stephenson



Photo credit: Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council

Everyone, in every ZIP code, deserves the opportunity to live a healthy life and achieve their full potential. The Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) is working to make this vision a reality through its Health Equity Zone (HEZ) initiative. HEZ is a proven model that builds the power of community members to address the underlying factors in their neighborhoods that have the greatest impact on health outcomes.

Why HEZ Works

Research shows that 80% of health outcomes are determined outside the doctor's office, inside our communities. Health starts when we have access to neighborhood services; safe, affordable housing; healthy foods; safe communities; and employment opportunities.

The HEZ model offers a path to improve local health outcomes – and solve the most pressing challenges faced by community members every day. It also engages residents to join and lead broader efforts to eliminate barriers like poverty and repair injustices in systems such as education, health, criminal justice, and transportation.

When we work together to invest in building healthy, vibrant, and resilient communities, everyone benefits. Health outcomes get better, communities flourish, and our economy grows stronger.

How HEZ Works

The HEZ model is led by the community, for the community. Through a collaborative, community-led process, each Health Equity Zone conducts a needs assessment and implements a data-driven plan of action to address conditions that are preventing people from being as healthy as possible. RIDOH provides support to communities to ensure the model is successfully implemented in line with core public health principles.

Results

Four years into implementation, the HEZ model is already showing results. Health Equity Zones have contributed to the following achievements at the community level:

- **44% ↓** in **childhood lead poisoning** (Pawtucket)
- **24% ↓** in **teen pregnancy** (Central Falls)
- **13% ↓** in **feelings of loneliness** (West End, Elmwood, & Southside Providence)
- **5-7% ↓** in **body weight** for 21% of Diabetes Prevention Program participants (HEZs Statewide)
- **40% ↑** in redemption of **SNAP farmers' market incentives** (West Warwick)
- **36% ↑** in **access to fruits and vegetables** (Olneyville)
- **163% ↑** in **community engagement** (HEZs Statewide)
- **46** opioid users **diverted from the criminal justice system** (West Warwick)
- **>1000** graduates of evidence-based **chronic disease self-management workshops** (HEZs Statewide)

Partner with Us!

Funding is needed to help existing HEZs maintain and expand their work – and to create HEZs in new communities. To learn more about how you can work with RIDOH to invest in and help sustain this model, email Christopher Ausura at christopher.ausura@health.ri.gov or Mia Patriarca at mia.patriarca@health.ri.gov.