

# Connecting the Dots Between Health and Well-being, Business, Community, and Prosperity

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## INTRODUCTION

Achieving economic success in business is interlinked with value creation for society. This idea is central to the notion of “creating shared value” as introduced by Porter and Kramer and includes social responsibility, philanthropy, as well as sustainability (1). Alignment of value creation between business and society extends into the building of cultures of health and well-being within corporations. This is not a new topic for the *Worksite Health Promotion* column in *ACSM’s Health & Fitness Journal*<sup>®</sup> — indeed, several columns have addressed it (2–4) — however, besides the advantages of building a corporate culture of health and well-being (2,4,5) and reporting on it (3,6), another major benefit relates to prosperity. Prosperity of both the organization and the community is a win-win scenario. This column will explore some of the connections and relationships between health and well-being, business, community, and prosperity that are generative, positive, and mutually beneficial.

## CONNECTING DOTS

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Hence, health and well-being, business, and community are clearly linked, and when positive alignment occurs between these three elements, improved prosperity may result (see Figure). These observations are no longer merely a promise. Evidence suggests that companies recognized for their cultures of safety and health yield greater value for their investors compared with

their counterparts based on excess annual returns of more than 3% to as much as 17% over Standard & Poor’s 500 Index (8–10) or the South African Stock Exchange (11). Therefore, the link between workforce health and community is related to business profitability.

This connection becomes even more visible when relationships between employment sector and county-level health are considered. A recent report described this relationship by analyzing health data (prevalence of smoking, obesity, physical inactivity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease–related deaths) across more than 3,100 U.S. counties and interviewing employers and community groups (12). Results indicated that certain employment sectors had a significantly elevated likelihood of being located in high-risk counties. For example, across the United States, the retail trade sector (think of gas stations, food stores, appliance stores, etc.) was more likely to be located in counties with high rates for

**Figure.** Connections and relationships between health and well-being, business, community, and prosperity.



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smoking, physical inactivity, and diabetes. The manufacturing sector (think of food and beverage companies, clothing manufacturers, etc.) was more likely to be located in counties with poor health as indicated by higher prevalence rates for smoking, physical inactivity, obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease–related deaths. Major conclusions indicated the following:

- Employment sectors with unhealthy workforces are more likely to be located in counties with poor health.
- Employers invest in community health using three main strategies:
  1. Strategic philanthropy
  2. Corporate social responsibility
  3. Creating shared value
- A multitude of opportunities exist to link community and workplace health.

### THE NEED FOR HEALTH REPORTING

Hence, a strong business case is made for cross-sectoral investments in community health and well-being that includes the benefits of economic prosperity. As a result, it could be expected that investors will take notice of this. However, it is less clear how investors would know about the health and well-being–related activities of any specific business if there are no reports that can be read, reviewed, or considered in a standardized manner. This is where the issue of corporate reporting comes in (3). If companies report on their health and well-being–related activities as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) portfolios, then investors and financial analysts can include health and well-being as part of their investment analyses. Such health and well-being information may become part of the criteria used for investors to invest in a socially responsible manner using, for example, “Socially Responsible Investing” (SRI). SRI, sometimes known as social investment, sustainable, socially conscious, “green,” or ethical investing, refers to any investment strategy that seeks to consider both financial return and social/environmental good to bring about a positive change. Another example is “Environmental, Social, and Governance” (ESG) criteria. ESG is a set of standards for a company’s operations that socially conscious investors use to screen potential investments. Environmental criteria look at stewardship of the natural environment. Social criteria examine corporate relationships with employees, suppliers, customers, and the communities where it operates. Governance addresses leadership, executive pay, audits, internal controls, and shareholder rights.

Incorporation of CSR or ESG criteria into investment decisions requires data. Corporate reporting can provide these data and in this manner support decision-making for investments that generate “flow” in capital. Such “flows” relate in the marketplace to (13)

- A flow of information from corporations to investors and other intermediaries that generate ratings, research, and data products.

- A flow of capital moving from investors to corporations.
- A flow of influence from standard setters, civil society, government, and media.

For such “flows” to be generated, reporting needs to occur and needs to be standardized to be comparable and reliable. The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) provides such standards and is currently active in introducing new standards that address corporate health and safety — the GRI 403: Occupational Health and Safety 2018 (13,14) — and specific to cultures of health and well-being is introducing principles that will aid in the development of consistent measurement.

### PRINCIPLES TO CONSIDER

Four principles have been proposed by the GRI to lay the foundation for the private sector’s critical role in building and benefiting from a culture of health and well-being. They are intended to articulate society’s changing expectations of businesses and investors for corporations to provide leadership and contributions toward improvement of population health (13):

- **Principle 1:** The private sector is integral to shaping and promoting societal values, narratives, and language around health and to improving population health in ways that prioritize equity.
- **Principle 2:** Business success depends on healthy employees, families, communities, customers, suppliers, and other stakeholders; a healthy society is a shared value.
- **Principle 3:** Successful business leadership embraces health as a strategic priority to be integrated consistently across governance, strategy, investments, operations, products, and services.
- **Principle 4:** Responsible businesses measure and disclose their health impacts and contributions to a culture of health. Businesses and investors use this to enhance operational and investment decision-making.

These principles go a long way in connecting the dots between health and well-being, business, community, and prosperity. Undoubtedly, they will prove helpful in furthering the business-community health and well-being agenda.

### OBSTACLES

Despite important progress, it is worth noting several obstacles that remain. For business to be influential in improving the health and well-being of its workforce and the community and be both a leader in such efforts as well as benefit from the outcomes, it will have to pursue a prevention agenda and address several challenges. These challenges have been delineated previously (15) and are summarized here:

- Limited leadership and advocacy.
  - Visible and sustained leadership commitment to prevention and health and well-being as well as advocacy

**TABLE: Examples of Initiatives That Connect Health and Well-being, Business, Community, and Prosperity**

Organization	Initiative	Brief Description
Harvard Business School and Harvard School of Public Health	Building a Culture of Health: A New Imperative for Business <a href="https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/ecpe/programs/culture-of-health-individual-leaders/">https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/ecpe/programs/culture-of-health-individual-leaders/</a>	Every company has the potential to improve health through its products and practices. This program wants to encourage business leaders to prioritize the protection and promotion of health and well-being. To understand how some companies are already contributing to health — and how to encourage others to do so — they've launched a program called A Culture of Health (COH): A Business Leadership Imperative.
Health Enhancement Research Organization (HERO)	Healthy Workplaces Healthy Communities <a href="http://get-hwhc.org/">http://get-hwhc.org/</a>	Healthy Workplaces Healthy Communities is a national employer-community collaboration focused on better health. This initiative provides business and community leaders with practical tools and strategies for building support and investing in shared priorities.
National Academies of Medicine; Roundtable on Population Health Improvement	Action Collaborative on Business Engagement in Building Healthy Communities <a href="http://nationalacademies.org/hmd/Activities/PublicHealth/PopulationHealthImprovementRT/Business-Collaborative.aspx">http://nationalacademies.org/hmd/Activities/PublicHealth/PopulationHealthImprovementRT/Business-Collaborative.aspx</a>	The Collaborative's purpose is to catalyze and facilitate private sector partnerships and actions of business, health, community, and public sectors to work together to enhance the lives of workers and communities by improving the nation's health and wealth.
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation	Building a Culture of Health <a href="https://www.rwjf.org/en/how-we-work/building-a-culture-of-health.html">https://www.rwjf.org/en/how-we-work/building-a-culture-of-health.html</a>	Our health is greatly influenced by complex factors such as where we live, and the strength of our families and communities. But we are well aware that no individual, community, organization, or initiative can change the trajectory of America's health alone.
U.S. Surgeon General	Call to Action on "Community Health and Prosperity" (See: <i>Federal Register</i> . 2018;83(173):45243–4)	A publication outlining a conceptual framework with case examples and available evidence on the business case for investing in community health is proposed.

to engage governmental agencies and regulatory bodies is critical to success.

- Poor alignment between financial incentives and disease prevention.
  - Prevention, safety, and promotion of health and well-being need to occur across three significant life stages: childhood, working age, and government-run Medicare. Instead of a fragmented approach across these three life stages, financial incentives need to be aligned so that all stakeholders benefit from investment regardless of when such benefits are accrued.
- Limitations in research quality and investment.
  - Challenges remain in the quality of research conducted in this field mainly due to continued lack of funding. A fraction of research dollars assigned to prevention goes to workplace initiatives (16).
- Regulation does not support evidence-based practice.
  - As opposed to required clinical standards for preventive care supported by recommendations from the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, no similar structure exists for community or workplace health and well-being programs despite the fact that the Community Preventive Services Task Force reviews and compiles evidence of this body of work.
- Partnerships between communities and employers.
  - In recent years, this challenge has been addressed across many communities. Progress is being made in both the number and the quality of such partnerships.

## EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD

In addition to the examples used above, there are many noteworthy efforts that address the connections and relationships between health and well-being, business, community, and prosperity in some way, shape, or form. Lots of examples, stories, and analyses are made available through these types of initiatives. Examples of such initiatives include those presented in the Table above.

## PRACTICAL APPLICATION

So, what can you do with this information? How can you make this actionable and meaningful in practice? First, consider this column a primer to increase awareness and provide a brief background on the connections between health and well-being, business, community, and prosperity. Second, find out if this topic has resonance at your organization. If not, continue to educate and stimulate interest. If so, move to find out what next steps make sense for your organization.

When alignment of interests related to health and well-being and financial incentives are made visible for all stakeholders, things happen. In this case, major issues and concerns of our time — all the way from health behaviors to global warming — can be addressed and improved upon by connecting the dots between health and well-being, business, community, and prosperity, but it will take all of us to do so!

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