



JOHNS HOPKINS
BLOOMBERG SCHOOL
of PUBLIC HEALTH

Bloomberg American
Health Initiative

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

Bloomberg American Health Initiative



Reflecting on 2025

Through education, research, and practice, the Bloomberg American Health Initiative works to address five critical 21st-century challenges to health in the United States: addiction and overdose, adolescent health, environmental challenges, food systems for health, and violence.

Established in late 2016 with a \$300 million gift from Bloomberg Philanthropies, the Initiative has since grown into a network of over 400 Bloomberg Fellows, partnered with more than 600 local, state, and national organizations, and funded hundreds of projects to improve health.

2025 was a year of deeper impact for the Initiative. Following a record number of applicants, the program welcomed 60 new Bloomberg Fellows, drawn from 59 organizations around the country. We welcomed Mudia Uzzi, PhD '22, MSc, as a new Bloomberg Assistant Professor of American Health in the violence focus area. Among more than 80 funded projects, we supported an effort to help states implement a national plan to address intimate partner violence, supported the development of a new framework to address chronic school absence, and released a policy toolkit to advance laws guaranteeing children access to recess.

In 2025, the Initiative collaborated with Theater of War Productions to host theatrical readings of *A Long Day's Journey into Night*, a renowned play by Eugene O'Neill about addiction, in Washington, D.C.; Huntsville, Alabama; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Boston, Massachusetts. At the start of October, the Initiative hosted the eighth annual Bloomberg American Health Initiative Summit, where we welcomed policymakers, community leaders, and others who are advancing innovative health solutions.

This annual report shares some of these highlights.



From Policy Professor to Dean

Before becoming the 12th dean of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Keshia Pollack Porter, PhD '06, MPH, built a record of leadership that helped shape the Bloomberg American Health Initiative's approach to translating research into policy. Prior to her position as dean, she served as a Bloomberg Centennial Professor, director of the Institute for Health and Social Policy, and chair of the Department of Health Policy and Management.

In 2024, Pollack Porter co-led the Hopkins Judicial Health Notes high impact project, which created a new tool to reveal the public health implications of judicial decisions across the country. Recognizing that judges make decisions every day that shape health outcomes—often without access to relevant public health evidence—she helped create a practical, accessible resource that translates research into clear insights for the judicial system.

Dean Pollack Porter continues to play a central role in the Bloomberg American Health Initiative's policy package program, an effort that builds on her work to analyze the health impacts of all policies and seeks to move beyond identifying problems to advancing concrete, evidence-based solutions.

That same sense of purpose now guides her historic deanship as the first Black person—and only the second woman—to lead the School since its founding in 1916. She has emphasized that this moment calls for reimagining public health amid unprecedented challenges, while strengthening the partnerships and community that make progress possible.

Her work with the Bloomberg American Health Initiative offers a clear preview of that vision: one grounded in equity, collaboration, and a firm belief that, by thinking boldly and acting with intention, public health can rise to meet any challenge.

FELLOWS

447 total, including **376** MPH students, **71** DrPH students, **217** alumni.

COLLABORATING ORGANIZATIONS

358 collaborating organizations across **43** states, the District of Columbia, and two territories.

COURSES

39 courses taken by **over 3,000** students to date. Of note, the three Coursera courses offered by the Initiative have been taken by over 24,000 people worldwide.

ENDOWED FACULTY

The Initiative provides endowment support to **19** Bloomberg Professors of American Health and **eight** Bloomberg Centennial Professors.

FUNDED PROJECTS

The Initiative provided **87** grants, including **41** community collaborations, **25** policy projects, **15** major research projects, **five** educational innovations, and bridge funding for **one** project.

COMMUNICATIONS

The Initiative website attracted over **186,000** users and generated over **337,000** views. On social media, the Initiative accounts now have **over 6,500** followers on LinkedIn, **1,545** followers on Instagram, and **over 250** followers on our newest platform, BlueSky. Initiative leadership and faculty were featured in over **100** notable media outlets.

EVENTS

The 2025 Bloomberg American Health Summit had **532** in-person attendees and was live streamed by over **1,300** more. Additionally, we partnered with Theater of War Productions (see page 9) to put on **three** performances. The Initiative also supported **33** speaking engagements and conferences in 2025. These included convenings that highlighted the importance of recess in childhood development, introduced innovative strategies to reduce chronic absence in America, and highlighted new approaches to address intimate partner violence.

Addiction & Overdose

RESEARCH

HOW DISADVANTAGE AND DISCRIMINATION ARE ASSOCIATED WITH OVERDOSE RATES

New research by Mudia Uzzi, PhD, Bloomberg Assistant Professor of American Health, and his colleagues argues that where people live, and the discrimination faced by residents in these places, matters profoundly for who is most at risk of dying from an opioid-related overdose. Using nearly 80 years of neighborhood-level data, the research team analyzed fatal overdoses across almost 800 census tracts in the Chicago metro area before the COVID-19 pandemic (2017–2019) and during it (2020–2022). The research analyzed opioid overdose trends using death records from the Cook County Medical Examiner and comparing incidents to the census tract where they occurred. The findings: Before the pandemic, neighborhoods that experienced both historical redlining and contemporary segregation had the highest overdose death rates, averaging more than two additional fatal overdoses per census tract compared with neighborhoods that were advantaged both historically and today. During the COVID-19 pandemic, overdose deaths increased across the Chicago, but the burden shifted most dramatically to neighborhoods experiencing high levels of present-day segregation, even if they had not been redlined in the past. These areas had nearly four more overdose deaths per tract than advantaged areas.

PRACTICE

A NOVEL APPROACH TO REDUCING OVERDOSE DEATHS IN VERMONT

In 2021, construction workers accounted for nearly a quarter of overdose deaths in Vermont, so when a group of construction leaders approached Bloomberg Fellow Stephanie Busch about making naloxone available on their job sites, she saw an opportunity to do more than distribute emergency overdose kits. Busch worked closely with the Vermont chapter of the Association of General Contractors to develop trainings that went beyond emergency response, addressing the broader context of “diseases of despair”—overdose, substance use disorder, and suicidality. Since its launch, Busch has continued to expand the program and hopes to bring lifesaving medication and training to more residents of Vermont.



PRACTICE

THE ROLE OF DRUG CHECKING IN SAVING LIVES

Recognizing the urgent need for accessible, real-time drug composition data, Danielle Friedman Nestadt, assistant scientist in the Department of Health, Behavior and Society, and Susan G. Sherman, Bloomberg Professor of American Health in the same department, partnered with the Sex Workers Promoting Action, Risk Reduction, and Community Mobilization (SPARC) Center to launch Check It—Maryland’s first point-of-care advanced drug checking intervention.

Fellow Spotlight



Bloomberg Fellow Daniel Soucy currently serves as a research analyst at the National Alliance to End Homelessness, where they use data to advocate for effective, evidence-based policies that aim to end homelessness across the United States. Rooted in both professional and personal experience, Soucy’s work centers people most impacted by housing instability, especially LGBTQIA+ and gender-expansive communities, while challenging systems of inequality. Through participatory research and policy analysis, Soucy uplifts the voices of those with lived experience and advocates for structural change in housing, health care, and behavioral health.

Adolescent Health

RESEARCH

GUIDING STRATEGIES TO REDUCE CHRONIC ABSENCE

Today, more than one in four students nationwide are considered chronically absent, defined as missing 10% or more of the school year. In some districts, that number is closer to one in two students. Chronic absence puts long-term learning, health, development, and future economic stability at risk. While it affects students across all demographics, disparities are especially pronounced across race, geography, and socioeconomic status. In 2025, public health and education experts from Johns Hopkins University, Kaiser Permanente, and Attendance Works released a new public health framework for understanding and addressing chronic absence. The framework, led by Catherine Falconer and supported by the Initiative, includes specific actions to improve student attendance by encouraging collaboration across education, health care, and other social service organizations. The framework was shared publicly at an event in June at the Hopkins Bloomberg Center in Washington, D.C., and has informed a national project to be launched by Kaiser Permanente.



RESEARCH

PLAY, POLICY, AND POTENTIAL: A TOOLKIT TO SUPPORT ADVANCING RECESS IN SCHOOLS THROUGH STATE LAWS

Today, only 12 states and Washington, D.C., have formal recess policies in place that require students to have unstructured play, and nearly all of those policies exclude middle school students. At the same time, children are spending close to 50 hours a week in school or completing school-related work. Removing recess from that schedule takes away one of the few dedicated opportunities children have to build social skills, resolve conflict, and practice independence. The first policy package supported by the Initiative, and led by Erin Hager, a professor in the Department of Population, Family and Reproductive Health, and Rachel Deitch, a program officer in the same department, offers insight into the importance of recess, provides policymakers and advocates with model legislation and outreach materials, and shares state-by-state data on the current state of research policies. In late 2025, Hager and Deitch hosted a convening of policymakers, researchers, and advocates at the Hopkins Bloomberg Center in Washington, D.C., to discuss the importance of recess and learn from leaders who have enacted recess policies in their states. Following the gathering, attendees from Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia are working to build stronger recess policies in their states.

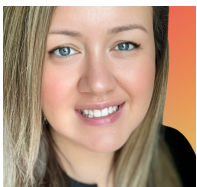


PRACTICE

HOW YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH AMBASSADORS ARE SHAPING MENTAL WELLNESS IN CALIFORNIA

The Community Action Partnership of San Luis Obispo County joined forces with Sarah Murray, associate professor in the Department of Mental Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, to launch the Youth Mental Health Ambassadors program. With support from the Bloomberg American Health Initiative, the program set out to uplift youth voices in the creation of school-based mental health support systems that are both culturally relevant and grounded in lived experience. At the heart of the program is the belief that young people aren't just the beneficiaries of mental health resources—they're the experts in what their peers need.

Fellow Spotlight



Bloomberg Fellow Bobbie Downs has spent her career building more effective systems to serve the most vulnerable populations of learners. She now serves as Assistant Superintendent for the Burlington County Special Services School District in New Jersey, where she is responsible for improving the school system through staff development, student programming, and initiatives that support the social and emotional well-being of students and educators.

Environmental Challenges

RESEARCH

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS, FOOD LOSS, AND WASTE IN THE U.S. AQUATIC FOOD SYSTEM

The U.S. is the world's fourth-largest consumer and the largest importer of aquatic food. A study, led by Bloomberg Fellow Elizabeth Nussbaumer and published in *Global Environmental Change*, analyzed the energy use, greenhouse gas emissions, and water consumption of different seafood products across the U.S. supply chain. Their findings show that the most energy-efficient products include canned, fresh, and frozen sockeye salmon, frozen pollock, and frozen catfish. The seafood with the lowest greenhouse gas emissions includes canned, fresh, and frozen sockeye salmon, frozen pollock, canned and frozen tuna, and frozen Atlantic salmon.

EQUITY

CLOSING THE GAP: ADVANCING LUNG CANCER EQUITY IN BLACK COMMUNITIES

Bloomberg Fellow Shanada Monestime led the development of a short documentary series titled, "Closing the Gap: Advancing Lung Cancer Equity in Black Communities." This series showcases community-led efforts to increase lung cancer awareness and improve access to screening in Black and Caribbean communities. Produced through the READY LUNG initiative, the film features trusted community voices and highlights partnerships with local organizations to deliver education and outreach. While the film focuses on broader engagement efforts, the initiative also addressed environmental and structural barriers to screening through targeted workshops at the community level aimed at empowering individuals to seek care and early screenings.

EQUITY

HOW EXTREME HEAT IMPACTS AMERICA'S MOST VULNERABLE

2025 had another record-breaking summer. Bloomberg Associate Professor of American Health Jaime Madrigano analyzed neighborhood characteristics and behavior patterns that could increase vulnerability to heat, particularly for marginalized communities who may not have access to in-unit heating and cooling and often bear the brunt of climate change. Only two years into this five-year-long project, Madrigano and her partners at ISeeChange, gathered enough evidence on improper cooling in homes in New Orleans to lead to the city's new Healthy Homes ordinance, which requires rental property owners to provide cooling systems capable of maintaining a maximum bedroom temperature of 80 degrees Fahrenheit to three feet above the floor.



Fellow Spotlight



Bloomberg Fellow Justina Thompson began her path to public health not in a classroom or city office, but in a neighborhood farmers market. Here she saw how systemic and racialized disparities in access to healthy, affordable food impacted the health of residents, particularly low-income communities of color. Today, Thompson serves as Program Manager for Environmental Justice in the City of Philadelphia's Office of Sustainability, where she provides technical assistance, workshops, and capacity-building support to help ensure grassroots organizations have the tools to thrive and serve those in need. Looking ahead, Thompson hopes to help Philadelphians make informed decisions about their health and environment, while advocating for vulnerable communities that need stronger protections.

Food Systems for Health

POLICY

BRINGING FREE SCHOOL MEALS TO STUDENTS IN NEW YORK

Bloomberg Fellow Cody Bloomfield and her collaborating organization Hunger Solutions New York joined Community Food Advocates to launch a statewide campaign for healthy school meals for all students in New York. Research has shown that providing free school meals to students reduces food insecurity, supports learning, improves mental and physical health, and bolsters educational and economic equity. After three years of concerted effort, statewide universal free school meals have been included in the state's FY2026 budget.

EVIDENCE

AN EVALUATION OF ONE MOBILE FARMACY

In 2023, the Central Texas Food Bank launched the Mobile FARMacy program to deliver fresh, nutritious food directly to patients through partnerships with health care providers. This innovative model allows providers to “prescribe” healthy foods, which patients can then access at market-style mobile pantries located at health care facilities. With funding from the Bloomberg American Health Initiative, members of the Central Texas Food Bank Health + Wellness team—Alex Pinedo, Kate Thornton, Vanessa Castro, and Bella Kirchner, with support from Melissa Walls, Bloomberg Professor of American Health—conducted a comprehensive, community-informed evaluation of the program. Nearly 60% of participants said they felt more supported by their health care provider and 71% reported feeling more connected to their clinic as a result of participating in the program. That sense of connection extended to the broader community, with two-thirds of respondents saying the program helped them feel more connected to others.



Fellow Spotlight



Bloomberg Fellow Jordan Smith currently serves as the Aiaola Food Is Medicine Program Manager at Hawai'i Good Food Alliance where she works to drive policy and systems change to ensure that all of the people of Hawai'i—especially Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and historically marginalized communities—have access to nourishing, locally grown food.

Violence

POLICY

ADDRESSING SUICIDE IN PUERTO RICO

Bloomberg Fellow Maria Coss and her colleagues at the Puerto Rico Department of Health's Commission on Suicide Prevention have published the first-ever English edition of their annual suicide report, marking a major step toward greater data transparency and accessibility. Between 2000 and 2024, Puerto Rico recorded 7,181 suicides, averaging 287 deaths per year, with 233 reported in 2024. By releasing the report in English for the first time, the Commission is working to broaden the reach of this critical data, both within Puerto Rico and beyond.

RESEARCH

QUANTIFYING INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE SURVIVORS WHO ARE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Women who experience intimate partner violence are four times more likely to experience homelessness than those who do not. Recognizing this connection, in 2016 the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development expanded its definition of homelessness to include individuals fleeing or attempting to flee violence. However, the Department's annual census of the homeless population, the Point in Time Count, may not fully capture the scope of IPV-related homelessness. With funding from the Bloomberg American Health Initiative, Michele Decker, Bloomberg Professor of American Health in the Department of Population, Family and Reproductive Health, Assistant Scientist Kristin Bevilacqua, and Bloomberg Fellow Janice Miller, and House of Ruth Maryland, set out to quantify this "undercount" in publicly available data from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Among continuums of care represented by respondent-shelters, in 2019, the Department reported 13,993 sheltered survivors, while Decker and Miller estimated the actual number at 15,216—an undercount of 1,223, or 8.0%. In 2020, the Department reported 14,319 survivors, whereas Decker and Miller estimated 15,669, revealing an undercount of 1,350, or 8.6%. Decker and Miller's research underscores the urgent need to better integrate IPV service providers into the Point in Time Count process to capture the true scale of homelessness among survivors of intimate partner violence.

EVIDENCE

LESSONS FROM HAWAII'S YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM

Bloomberg Fellow Nehali Vishwanath and her team at the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform have been examining how Hawai'i supports young people involved in the juvenile justice system through continuums of care and community-based alternatives to youth incarceration. The findings from their interviews highlight the dramatic transformation Hawai'i's juvenile justice system has undergone in the last decade. Juvenile justice services in Hawai'i went from sending kids to their correctional facility for small issues to now only having about 30 or so youth in custody. This represents around an 80% reduction from its peak. The research reinforced a central insight that kids do best when they're able to stay at home in their community and with their family.



Fellow Spotlight



Bloomberg Fellow Alejandra Casarrubias moved to the U.S. after fleeing violence in her native Mexico City and made it her life's work to help others. She earned her nursing degree and went on to practice in a rehabilitation hospital, an urgent care clinic, and an emergency department. Today, she is the clinical manager at Casa de Salud Clinic in New Mexico and one of only a handful of sexual assault nurse examiners in the central counties of New Mexico.

TAKING PUBLIC HEALTH OFF THE PAGE AND ONTO THE STAGE

Collaborating with Theater of War Productions, a social impact organization that uses art to drive community conversations about social and health issues, the Initiative offered Bloomberg Fellows an opportunity to bring performances to their own communities. Azita Amiri at the University of Alabama (Huntsville); JR Westberg with the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office; and Pete Tanghe with the North Memorial Hospital in Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Misch Whitaker Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program and Fatumata Mima Kaba with Boston Public Health Commission in Boston, Massachusetts, were selected.

These community events drew large and diverse audiences. The discussions that followed were powerful and honest, as people from across sectors shared their perspectives and lived experiences about addiction and overdose. The conversations, facilitated by Brian Doerries, artistic director of Theater of War Productions, raised common themes of stigma, hope, healing, faith, and generational addiction and family patterns.

The success of these events demonstrates the unique role art can play in public health. By creating space for honesty, empathy, and connection, these performances help communities address challenges that might otherwise feel stigmatizing, isolating, or overwhelming.



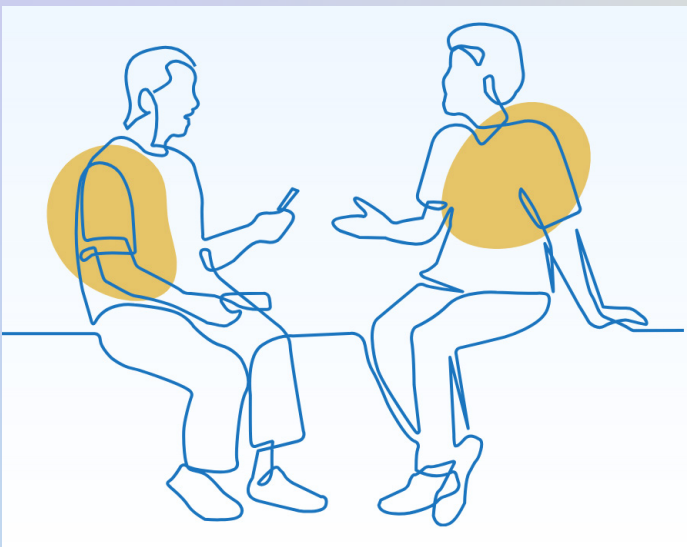
GATEWAY 2 CHANGE: A NEW APPROACH TO PREVENTING VIOLENCE

Intimate partner violence affects millions of people in the United States each year. For survivors, individuals who use violence, and their loved ones, the cycle of abuse can feel impossible to break. Harm-reduction resources for survivors have expanded, but individuals at risk of using violence lack access to early intervention or crisis response, leaving families with few places to turn for support.

This year, the Initiative launched a high impact project that brings a unique approach to preventing intimate partner violence.

Facilitated by House of Ruth Maryland, *Gateway 2 Change* is a new 24/7 hotline that provides support for individuals who fear they might hurt someone they love. It is one of the only 24-hour hotlines in the U.S. that focuses on aggressors or people at risk of committing violence. *Gateway 2 Change* offers confidential hotline support and linkage to resources, creating a crucial opportunity to stop violence before it happens and providing real-time support no matter when violence has occurred.

This new resource offers people in Maryland—or in other communities who adopt the model—the support they need to break the cycle of violence and choose a better path.



BLOOMBERG AMERICAN HEALTH SUMMIT

The eighth annual Bloomberg American Health Summit convened public health practitioners, policymakers, community leaders, and Bloomberg Fellows from across the country in Baltimore for a dynamic exchange on some of the most urgent public health challenges facing the United States and the innovative solutions emerging to address them.



During the Summit, leaders from state and federal health agencies, nonprofit organizations, journalism, and local government came together to share perspectives, challenge assumptions, and advance ideas that strengthen and protect public health. The program reflected the breadth of the field, bringing policy, practice, and lived experience into the same conversation.

This year's speakers included: Baltimore Mayor Brandon M. Scott; Birmingham Mayor Randall L. Woodfin; Michelle Taylor, MD, DrPH, MPA, Commissioner of the Baltimore City Health Department; Angela Ferrell-Zabala, Executive Director of Moms Demand Action; Yolanda Jacobs, President of the American Federation of Government Employees, Local 2883, representing the CDC; and Michael Botticelli, former Director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy under President Obama, among many others. Together, they offered insights grounded in leadership, evidence, and on-the-ground experience.





Plenary sessions explored a wide range of timely and complex issues, including protecting the public health workforce, expanding access to harm reduction on Tribal lands, advancing educational justice and mental health support for immigrant youth, protecting women's health, and examining the promise and pitfalls of artificial intelligence in public health.

Following the plenary sessions, Bloomberg Fellows, faculty, and partner organizations engaged in site visits across Baltimore, connecting with local experts and organizations to build new skills and deepen their understanding of how policy translates into practice.

As it marked its eighth year, the Bloomberg American Health Summit reaffirmed its role as a national convening focused on equity, leadership, and actionable policy solutions, bringing together those working at every level to advance a healthier, more just future.



FUELING IDEAS THAT IMPROVE HEALTH AND SAVE LIVES

As communities across the country faced funding challenge, and key research lost federal funding, the Bloomberg American Health Initiative awarded a record number of grants to support and advance public health efforts in communities across the country.

Network of Practice Grants

In May, the Initiative awarded 14 Network of Practice grants to support innovative projects that improve the health and well-being of communities across the United States. Each Network of Practice Grant provides up to \$25,000 to support projects led by collaborating organizations of the Initiative, with a faculty adviser from the Bloomberg School. All funded projects align with one of the Initiative's five focus areas and propose community-specific approaches to urgent public health challenges.

These funded projects focused on bringing fresh produce to communities in need, enhancing the quality of life for pedestrians and bicyclists, and more.

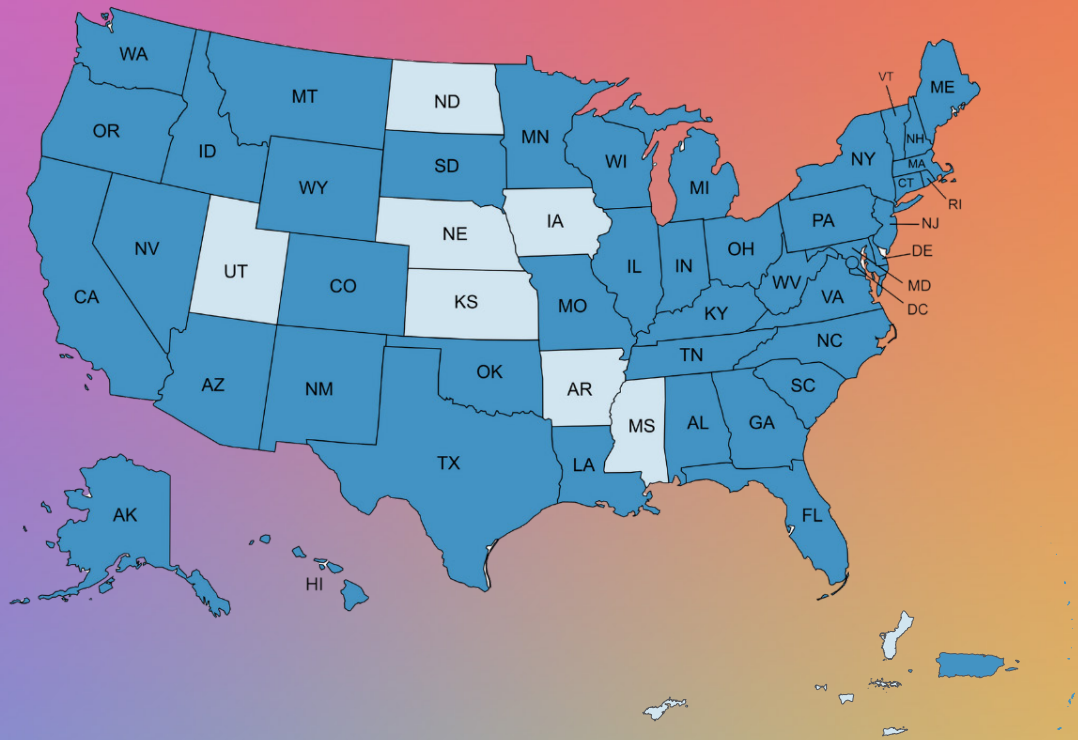
This unique funding stream is available to organizations who have employees participating in, or who have participated in, the Bloomberg Fellowship program. These grants allow community organizations to build programs that work for the people they know best.

Mid-Year Grants

The Initiative also awarded more than \$300,000 across 11 mid-year grants to support faculty members in investigating and advancing public health solutions that benefit communities across the country. Each mid-year grant offers up to \$30,000 for projects that align with one of the Initiative's five focus areas.

These funded projects focused on a range of topics—from promoting youth well-being and assessing barriers to food access, to implementing strategies to reduce youth suicide rates in native communities.

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