

Emerging Framework: Pathways to Population Health

By Somava Stout, M.D., M.S., Institute for Healthcare Improvement

If your organization is on the journey to population health, you won't want to miss the Pathways to Population Health (P2PH) framework just released jointly by the American Hospital Association/Health Research Education Trust, the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, the Network for Regional Healthcare Improvement, the Public Health Institute, and Stakeholder Health via 100 Million Healthier Lives with the support of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.¹ These key partner organizations, together with over 50 pioneer sponsors, are engaging hundreds of healthcare organizations in a shared journey to population health with a focus on 1) speaking with a common voice and language; 2) breaking population health into simple, powerful portfolios of activity; and 3) developing tools and pathways to make the journey easier.

This article reviews what the P2PH framework is, who it is relevant for, and how it can help you on the journey to population health.

What Does the Framework Say?

The framework is divided into three main sections:

- 1. Foundational concepts and creating a common language:** defines key concepts and terms that are foundational to understanding the journey to population health (the *why*)
- 2. Portfolios of population health:** describes four interconnected portfolios of work that contribute to population health (the *what*)
- 3. Levers for implementation:** surfaces the levers that can be used to accelerate your progress within and across portfolios of work to improve population health (the *how*)

The first section provides simple, clear language about what population health is. For instance, it clarifies that proactive management of a patient panel is population management while population health also includes improving the well-being of the places in which people live, work, learn, play, and pray; distinguishes between defined populations (a group of people with something

in common) and place-based populations (a group of people who are related to a place); and adapts the World Health Organization's definition of health as mental, physical, social, and spiritual well-being. In addition, this section articulates six foundational concepts:

1. Health and well-being develop over a lifetime.
2. Social determinants drive health and well-being outcomes throughout the life course.
3. Place is a determinant of health, well-being, and equity.
4. The health system needs to address the key demographic shifts of our time.
5. The health system can embrace innovative financial models and deploy existing assets for greater value.
6. Health creation requires partnership because healthcare only holds a part of the puzzle.

These six foundational concepts are accompanied by references, tools, and examples to help healthcare organizations understand what acting according to these principles might look like.

The second section offers healthcare organizations a simple way to organize their work on population health into four portfolios of effort and recommends that they develop a balanced portfolio over time to achieve the greatest impact at a sustainable cost. Two of these portfolios relate to improving the health and well-being of the people healthcare is directly accountable for (patients and employees) and two relate to improving the health and well-being of the places a healthcare organization might be working in (the community):

People you directly reach:

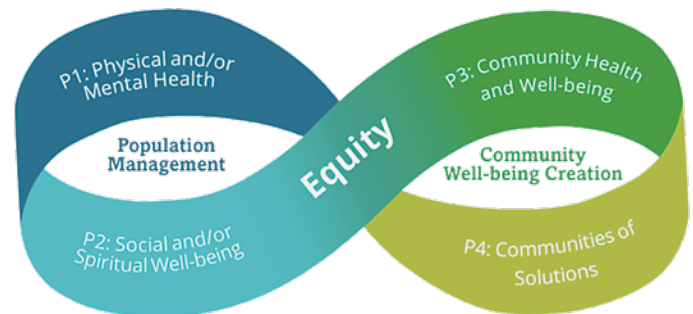
- Portfolio 1: Mental and physical health—proactively improving mental and/or physical health for the people you directly reach

Key Board Takeaways

Next steps for boards include:

1. Engage your board and organizational leadership in learning about the P2PH framework and assessing where you are on the journey to population health using the Pathways to Population Health Compass.
2. Create an action plan by portfolio for your journey to population health.
3. Create a governance structure that can oversee your organization's journey and help ensure that you are using your organization's assets strategically to achieve measurable, equitable, and sustainable population health impact.

Exhibit 1: Portfolios of Population Health Framework



- Portfolio 2: Social and spiritual well-being—assessing, connecting, and improving social and spiritual well-being for the people you directly reach

Places you relate to:

- Portfolio 3: Community well-being creation—partnering across sectors to improve a focused issue in a community (e.g., opioids, chronic disease, homelessness)
- Portfolio 4: Communities of solutions—in partnership with others, taking long-term stewardship for improving health, well-being, and equity by using non-traditional roles and assets to disrupt the underlying systems that produce inequity while growing the leadership of people most affected by inequity

These portfolios are interconnected and build off of and contribute to one another, as demonstrated in **Exhibit 1**.

¹ This article is adapted from Somava Stout et al., *Pathways to Population Health: An Invitation to Healthcare Change Agents*, 100 Million Healthier Lives/Institute for Healthcare Improvement, 2018.

There are opportunities for community integration to better leverage assets in all of the portfolios. Finally, equity and partnership with people with lived experience is a cross-cutting theme in every portfolio.

The third section focuses on key levers for implementation of the four portfolios. These include roles a health-care organization can play, relationships, governance, financing models,



policy, data, equity, and partnership with people with lived experience.

How Can You Use the Framework to Make Progress on Your Population Health Journey?

The Pathways to Population Health Web site offers simple tools to help health-care organizations make progress.²

These include:

- **A compass** that health-care organizations can use to assess where they are in terms of changes needed for population health as well as implementation strategies needed for each portfolio
- A curated **oasis** of high-value resources for hospital/health system transformation

In addition, each partner organization is working to engage health-care organizations that have opted in with free programmatic offerings to support them in their population health journey. To access these resources, go to the Web site (www.pathways2pophealth.org) and sign up for the campaign. Any group can sign up to be a pioneer sponsor to disseminate the framework, engage their members in the framework, and support them in making progress. ●

The Governance Institute thanks Somava Stout, M.D., M.S., Vice President, Institute for Healthcare Improvement, and Executive Lead, 100 Million Healthier Lives, for contributing this article. She can be reached at [sstout@IHI.org](mailto:ssout@IHI.org).

² See www.pathways2pophealth.org.