



Health Equity Zones Impact Summary

Since its founding in 2015, the Rhode Island Health Equity Zone (HEZ) initiative has contributed to the development of safer, healthier, and more resilient communities. Each of the 15 HEZs represents a community in Rhode Island where residents, stakeholders, and organizational leaders come together to build a brighter future for their community. In addition to developing and implementing programs residents want and need, HEZ members work to improve and transform the social, environmental, and economic conditions of their communities. The following summary illustrates the impact the HEZ initiative has had on Rhode Island to date.

Economic Opportunity

- The West Warwick HEZ, in a partnership with the Women’s Development Corporation, have implemented community housing and healthy neighborhoods strategies, establishing a pipeline of affordable, supportive housing. These efforts have contributed to the recent **reduction in housing cost burden in West Warwick, from 40% in 2020 to 38% in 2021.**¹
- The Central Providence HEZ leveraged the power of their collaborative to **secure an \$8 million investment** in a place-based transformational effort, *Central Providence Opportunities*. The economic development activities and interventions of the Central Providence Opportunities HEZ have contributed to a **23% drop in housing cost burden¹ over three years**, increased **high school graduation rates in Providence from 74% in 2019 to 78% in 2022,**² despite COVID-19, and a **decrease in unemployment** from an average rate of **9.5% in 2020 to a return to the pre-pandemic rate of 3.3%** (2023 Jan-July).
- The Newport HEZ has engaged the city and North End residents to create and adopt the **first ever North End Equitable Development Strategy** for the North End of Newport, fostering an inclusive vision for growth that centers equity, supporting rather than displacing, current North End residents. By enacting a strategy for equitable development in the North End, the HEZ is supporting efforts to repair disparities and improve the social, economic, and environmental conditions.

Child and Adolescent Health

- In collaboration with multiple community and municipal partners, and through intensive education and programming, members of the Pawtucket and Central Falls HEZ contributed to the lowering of the **childhood lead poisoning rate in Pawtucket by 44% and in Central Falls by 38%.**²
- Bristol HEZ has focused on providing resources, support, and education to families with children ages 0-5 and expectant parents, particularly those **from** traditionally under-resourced communities. **Family enrollment in Bristol’s evidence-based home visiting program has increased 21%** since 2019.² These activities are expected to contribute to decreased rates of childhood obesity as well as increased educational attainment and high school graduation rates.

¹ HousingWorksRI Factbooks 2020-2023

² RI Kids Count Factbooks 2014-2022, Community Profiles

Behavioral Health

- The Washington County HEZ has provided evidence-based mental health first aid and suicide prevention training to **thousands of police officers, clergy, teachers, parents, and staff of youth-serving organizations**. These efforts have helped to contribute to the decrease of **3.8 suicide deaths per 100,000 per year**³ and to stopping the sharp increase, even reporting a slight decrease, in overdose deaths in RI in 2021.
- Overdose crisis response across the 15 HEZs supported the statewide effort, resulting in an **8.3% reduction** in drug overdose deaths from 2016 to 2019. These efforts also aligned with a **70% increase** in distribution of naloxone in community settings, a sharp increase in comparison to hospital and pharmacy distribution.³

Food Insecurity

- The HEZs and their collaborators are addressing food insecurity through farmer's markets, local neighborhood markets, community gardens, healthy cooking/nutrition classes, food pantries, provision of meals to residents in need, diabetes and healthy eating programs, and special programs for specific populations. These efforts have led to a **40% increase** in redemption of SNAP farmers' market incentives in West Warwick,⁴ and a **36% increase** in access to fruits and vegetables in Central Providence.⁵
- Overall, statewide rates of **food insecurity decreased 32%** from 2014-2019⁶ and have remained low in Rhode Island even as other states have seen significant increases following the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In 2022, the OneCranston HEZ implemented a food access and nutrition improvement program in partnership with the Comprehensive Community Action Program (CCAP). This project provided nearly **700 bags** of free produce to households via their farmer's market, supported five local farmers with increased income, and reported that **83% of program participants saw a reduction in their A1C (average blood sugar levels over the past three months)**. **CCAP Medical Center** diabetes residents who participated in the HEZ's physical health and nutrition program had a decrease in their A1C diabetes diagnostic tests after attending the farmer's markets.⁷

Healthcare Access

- Woonsocket HEZ activities and approaches to supporting teen health through increased access to healthcare, resources, and reproductive health education using three HEZ family planning and sexual health educators have contributed to a **33% reduction in average rates of teen pregnancy**

³ PreventOverdoseRI (<https://preventoverdoseri.org/see-the-data/>)

⁴ West Warwick Health Equity Zone Annual Report, July 2023

⁵ Central Providence Opportunities Health Equity Zone Annual Report, July 2023

⁶ Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap (<https://map.feedingamerica.org/>)

⁷ OneCranston Health Equity Zone Annual Report, July 2023

⁸in Woonsocket; similar efforts contributed to a **24% reduction in teen pregnancy rates in Central Falls.**⁸

- HEZ community efforts have contributed significantly to reducing the percent of Rhode Islanders who do not seek medical care due to cost **by more than 30% from 2013-2020.**⁹ Key strategies include implementing mobile health outreach and treatment; addressing cultural competency needs of residents; establishment of a community-based Community Health Worker workforce; improving public transportation access to healthcare facilities via bus stops and route changes; providing child care for parents to attend medical appointments; and assisting residents with insurance enrollment.

Environmental Health

- The Pawtucket Central Falls HEZ and the Newport HEZ partnered with city planning departments to **develop and adopt Complete and Green Streets ordinances**, designed to ensure safe access to roadways for users of all ages and abilities, and to improve urban green spaces.

COVID-19 Response

- Since receiving COVID-19 response funding in June 2020, the HEZs have showed their ability to have a significant impact supporting their communities during emergency response efforts. To date the HEZ have distributed more than **4 million masks**, more than **840,000 meals**, and roughly **328,000 COVID-19 self-test kits** to the most impacted communities.¹⁰
- HEZs stood up a community workforce of more than **200 Community Health Workers and community outreach specialists** who distributed more than **360,000 educational materials** and directly supported more than **425,000 Rhode Islanders**, fostering confidence and trust in the COVID-19 vaccine and bringing information, testing, and vaccination sites where they were needed most.¹¹

⁸ RI Kids Count Factbooks 2014-2022, Community Profiles

⁹ RI Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (<https://rhode-island-brfss-rihealth.hub.arcgis.com/>) 2013-2020

¹⁰ RI Department of Health, Health Equity Zone Initiative COVID-19 Response Data, 2020-2023