Health begins where we live, work, play, and learn. Social and environmental determinants of health can have a profound influence on the choices people have in their daily lives that promote or inhibit health. Peoples’ health behaviors, access to care, and their physical and social environments shape how healthy they are or have the potential to be. The degree to which each factor plays a role is based on a framework developed by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute for the national County Health Rankings (www.countyhealthrankings.org). In many areas—including Seattle—there are large disparities in both health outcomes and health factors, as shown below. This information helps community partners create strategies that make it easier for people to be healthy in their own communities.

Individuals and families with lower incomes generally have poorer health and lower life expectancy compared to those with higher incomes. Social-emotional development and general health are worse for young children whose families have incomes below the federal poverty level; adults living in poverty also are in poorer health and have much higher rates of heart disease and diabetes. In King County, children from poor families are more likely to be obese than other children.1

Lack of jobs and ability to pay for adequate food, clothing, and shelter are considered the most immediate and important health-related needs of the populations they serve. “This maybe sounds like a caricature, but the number one determinant is income. As society has become polarized between haves and have-not, that shows up in a big way ... if you had to pick out one thing, it would be the extent of poverty in our communities, which is growing.”

While diabetes prevalence in King County has remained stable, health factors related to diabetes—rates of obesity and physical inactivity—are steadily increasing.

1Robert Wood Johnson Foundation & Virginia Commonwealth University, County Health Calculator; http://countyhealthcalculator.org/location/153033/

15% of Seattle adults under 65 are estimated to be uninsured. 40% of those are eligible for coverage under Medicaid expansion.