

# COVID-19 EQUITY INVESTMENT GUIDE

Local Policy & Investment Priorities  
for an Equitable Rolling Recovery

July 2021 Update



**BARHI**  
Bay Area Regional Health  
Inequities Initiative

# 10 INVESTMENT PRIORITIES FOR AN EQUITABLE RECOVERY

- 1 Equity Officers** and supporting units institutionalized in county government and emergency response structures.
- 2 Community-Based Task Forces** comprised of populations most impacted by inequities, who can help develop and implement investment strategies.
- 3 Essential Worker Health** through dedicated resources for public health departments and other agencies to ensure worksite health and safety.
- 4 Community-Based Mental Health** through preventative community-based mental health services and crisis response as alternatives to policing.
- 5 Flexible Cash Assistance** for communities impacted by health inequities.
- 6 Black, Latinx, and Pacific Islander-Led and Supporting Small Business and Employment Social Enterprise**, including in rental subsidies and simplified procurement processes.
- 7 Rent, Mortgage, and Utility Relief** targeted to the communities who need them most.
- 8 Black Housing Initiatives** developed by the Black Housing Advisory Taskforce (Black HAT), including a regional Black housing financing pool and support for local projects.
- 9 Legal Counsel, Outreach, and Education** to make housing rights and assistance accessible to everyone.
- 10 Land Trusts and Limited Equity Housing Models** to make housing permanently affordable.

## **BARHII—The Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative**

We are the coalition of 11 Bay Area public health departments, joined by over 200 community partners in our work to advance health equity, economic opportunity, and racial justice. BARHII passionately fights the structural inequities communities of color face, by strengthening social and political inclusion, generating knowledge, training public servants and community leaders, and advocating for equitable health policies, so everyone in the Bay Area can flourish.

We have created this investment guide to support local governments in planning for a COVID-19 recovery process that safeguards the health and economic well-being of everyone who calls the Bay Area home.



### **A Once-in-a-Generation Challenge and Opportunity**

The Bay Area is at a singular moment. The COVID-19 pandemic has substantially worsened existing health inequities, and for Black, Latinx, and Pacific Islander populations, the impacts have been most severe. Families have lost loved ones. Households have accumulated major housing debt with no reasonable options to pay it back. Businesses have closed and jobs eliminated. Mental health and child development have been disrupted. Many low-wage workers have faced additional risks as essential workers, and others continue to face job and income losses. While our public health system has made great strides in vaccinations, many communities still face barriers to accessing vaccines and have significantly disproportionate infection rates.

The pandemic also has the potential to

shape health and well-being outcomes for a generation. For example, we could see an avalanche of foreclosures and evictions that reshapes the region's geography. Such an event would super-charge the Bay Area's worsening segregation by race and class, fracturing essential cultural communities and further restricting access to jurisdictions with health and economic-mobility-linked public resources.

At the same time, this is a moment of unparalleled promise. Despite deep inequities and public failures, vaccinations are finally a reality for the majority of the region, and job growth has picked up. New resources are flowing into our communities to help them recover and thrive. California has a historic state budget surplus and President Biden approved \$1.9 trillion in COVID-19 relief in March, with billions slated to come to California. Discussions are underway for additional federal investments.

## A Call for Investing in Equity

In the words of Dr. Mark Ghaly, Secretary of the California Health and Human Services Agency, this moment calls for “a disproportionate investment in populations and groups that have a disproportionate impact.”

We are already experiencing a “K-shaped recovery” in which higher-income households bounce back quickly while others may struggle for years<sup>1</sup>. But this is not inevitable, and a full recovery is possible for all of us.

We need to learn from past disasters in which our response efforts did not adequately respond to the layering of crisis on top of existing inequalities—like the transfers of wealth from Black families during the great recession and the mass dislocations of immigrant and working-class families from the North Bay fires. We must make strategic investments that mitigate these co-occurring crises and remedy the historical legacy—and continued practice—of inequitable investments.

Recovery investments must prioritize Black, Latinx, and Pacific Islander communities as well as other groups that experience higher

rates of COVID-19 morbidity and mortality on top of existing systemic bias. This includes unhoused people, undocumented people, incarcerated people, and individuals with arrest and conviction histories.

## A Rolling Recovery

Even as we see light at the end of the tunnel, the pandemic continues to claim lives and entrench inequities. We still need an agile response to address health risks in real-time, while simultaneously investing in a longer-term recovery that transforms living conditions for health equity communities.

Since March 2020, we have garnered the expertise of hundreds of public health professionals and community leaders across the Bay Area to develop our COVID-19 [Rolling Response and Recovery Plan](#), and companion [COVID-19 Equity Investment Guide series](#). We have used real-time data and early warning indicators from our core team, and BARHII members, to continually refine our approach, including this second version of the Investment Guide. While this version retains some focus on crisis response, it contains more strategies and principles for an equitable longer-term recovery in light of historic state and federal investments.



Mural in the Mission District, San Francisco

# PRINCIPLES FOR AN EQUITABLE RECOVERY



## 1. Direct Funds to Families Facing Injustice—especially Black, Latinx, and Pacific Islander Communities—and the CBOs that Serve Them.

- a. Name racial health equity as a goal and prioritize direct funding for families and communities that have been hardest hit by the pandemic and entrenched inequities.
- b. Identify the hardest-hit communities using public health data and indices like [RaceCounts Vulnerability and Recovery Index](#), the [Healthy Places Index](#), Policy Link's [National](#) and [Bay Area](#) Equity Atlas tools, and the [Urban Institute's Rental Assistance Priority Index](#).
- c. Contract directly with CBOs, small businesses, and social enterprises, [reducing barriers and prioritizing organizations](#) with deep roots in Black, Latinx, and Pacific Islander communities.

## 2. Help Equity Communities Chart their Own Course

- a. Make funding decisions collaboratively with community leadership, for instance, inviting health equity collaboratives and community-specific task forces to shape funding priorities and participate in contracting and granting decisions.
- b. Prioritize Black, Latinx, and Pacific Islander community participation in decision-making. Some communities have already crafted their own investment priorities, and public administrators should take these priorities seriously, identifying common priorities and opportunities for synergies across communities and position them for funding.
- c. Consider which communities may not have the organizational infrastructure to develop priorities, or promote them in formats governments are used to, and reach out directly to support the development process.
- d. Where communities' priorities diverge, support efforts to address disagreements and build a collective vision. This principle may also mean reducing the focus on "shovel-ready" projects and taking the time to co-develop strategies with communities that will be more efficient and effective over the long term.
- e. Utilize the [broad discretion offered to local jurisdictions in American Rescue Plan Act funding](#) to fund processes that support communities in charting their own course. Federal guidance allows the greatest local discretion for activities that address the public health impacts of the pandemic.

## 3. Choose a Focused Set of Catalytic Investments for Transformative Change

- a. This is a moment to take bold actions that transform our society and conditions for communities of color. Identify 3-5 priorities for focused investment that will transform systems and move the needle on health inequities.
- b. Think strategically about how to use one-time resources to build for the long haul. For instance, invest in capacity-building and training to enhance workforce and community readiness<sup>i</sup>. Fund pilots, providing enough resources to demonstrate proof of concept and position successful projects for longer-term funding. Or invest in strategies that allow one-time investments to provide long-term financial and health benefits, such as investing in a community land trust.

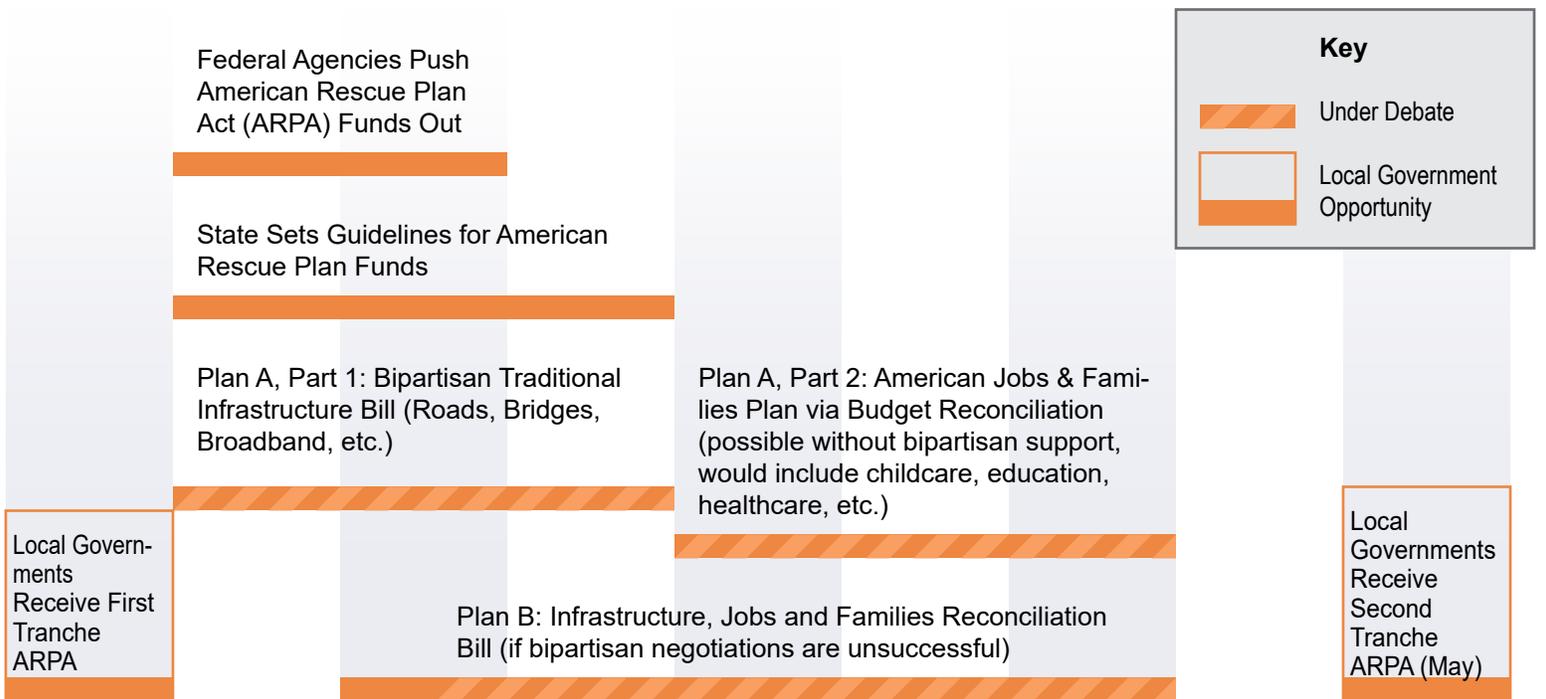
## 4. Invest in What We Need, Divest from Harmful Systems<sup>iii</sup>

- a. Move funds from systems that have harmed communities of color, such as policing and incarceration, and invest cost savings in community-serving priorities. For instance, savings from decarceration can be invested to house communities, or to institutionalize programs that interrupt violence or focus COVID response in Black, Latinx, and Pacific Islander communities.
- b. Counter the tendency in earlier funding cycles of law enforcement budgets consuming a disproportionate share of relief funding, making it harder to fund community priorities and public health.

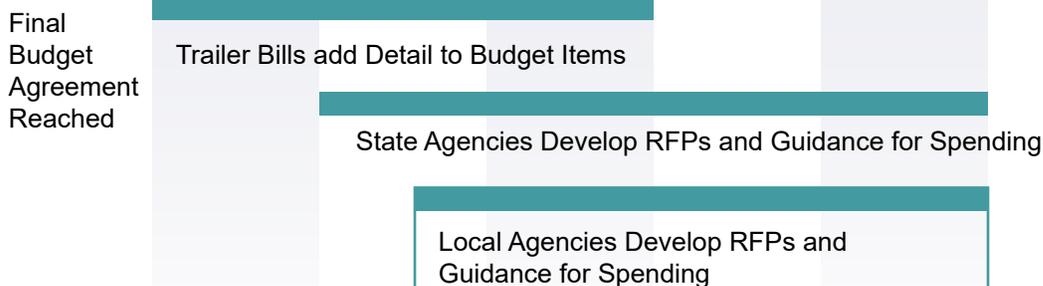
# UPCOMING FUNDING SOURCES

The chart below is a high-level timeline of upcoming investment decisions at the state and federal level as best as we can predict at this moment—noting that it gets more speculative later in the summer and fall. Local governments and community groups have multiple points of potential engagement to shape the direction of these sources. For instance, they can develop clear community priorities and work with BARHII and local leaders to identify appropriate sources in both tranches of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), additional federal funding, and state programs.

## Federal Funding



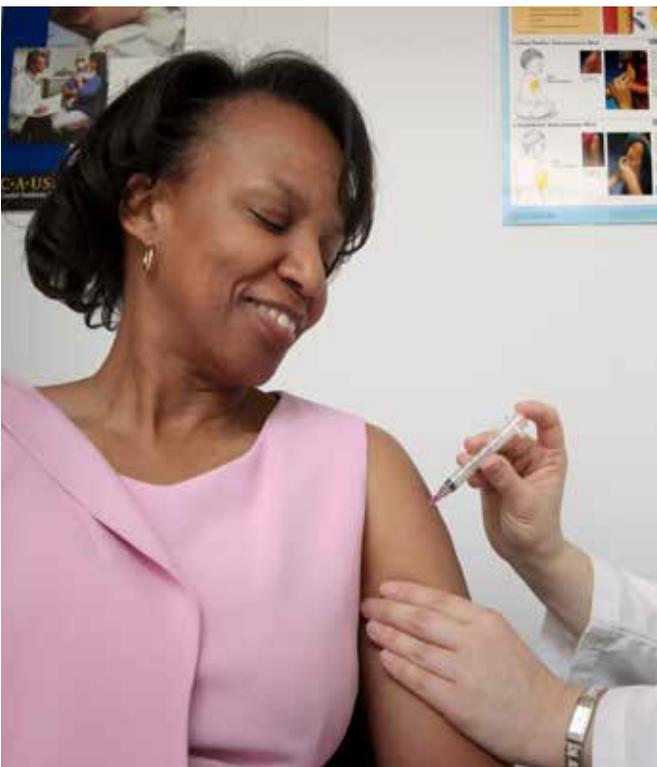
## State Funding



# INVESTMENT PRIORITIES

## Build Racial Equity into Response and Recovery Structures

BARHII, along with partners such as the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE), have worked for decades to dismantle government practices that uphold racism and transform government into a force for racial justice. Now is the moment to institutionalize this work across local government. It is also a time for public health to deepen its role as Chief Health Strategist, building cross-sector and community engagement in creating healthy and equitable living conditions.



**1. Equity Officers:** To address crises like wildfires and extreme heat events, and everyday disasters of long-standing health inequities, secure long-term funding for a permanent full-time Equity Officer and **supporting unit, and institutionalize these roles in county emergency** response protocols and incident command centers. Prioritize an Equity Officer position within the highest levels of the county’s administrative leadership, then allocate resources for an agency or department-level officer within public health. CDPH has secured [new CDC resources that will support equity officers or similar equity infrastructure in most California jurisdictions.](#)

- a. **Emerging Best Practice:** [San Francisco Office of Health Equity](#)
- b. **BARHII Resource:** [Embedding Equity into Emergency Operations](#)

**2. Community-Based Task Forces:** To understand, elevate, and address the health needs of racial and ethnic communities, support task forces comprised of populations most impacted by inequities, tailored to local needs, with compensation for participants. Task forces should be involved in developing, prioritizing, and implementing investment strategies. Support the capacity of these groups, investing in training, staffing, convening, and back-office support where they are independent of government agencies. Where communities are a smaller percentage of the population—such as Black, Pacific Islander, and Indigenous communities—establish or support regional taskforces that can work for community needs across multiple jurisdictions.

a. **Emerging Best Practices:**

- i. [The Bay Area Pacific Islander Task Force](#) serves as an advisory council to health departments across the region and raises awareness and visibility of Pacific Islander health and social issues.
- ii. [Sonoma County](#) and [Oakland](#) have established innovative networks of trusted community organizations to ensure that COVID-related information and resources reach communities.
- iii. ALL IN Alameda County convened community organizations interested in equitable recovery strategies, provided information on the American Rescue Plan, and summarized key themes (e.g., funding priorities, funding mechanisms, values for which to allocate funding, etc.) that emerged during the discussion.

**3. Essential Worker Health:** Workers in essential jobs such as food and agriculture, transportation, and logistics occupations have faced elevated risks during the COVID-19 pandemic. Latinx and Black workers have had particularly high excess mortality rates<sup>iv</sup>. These pandemic-related risks have compounded long-standing under-investment in workplace health. Dedicate resources for public health departments and other agencies to ensure health and safety of work sites for essential workers now and after the pandemic—prioritizing the hardest-hit occupations and industries, including carceral facilities. Invest in outreach, education, and enforcement of health standards, resourcing community-based and labor organizations to assist with these efforts. Continue to invest in vaccination efforts for industries and workplaces with low vaccination rates.

- a. **Emerging Best Practice:** Monterey County’s [Agricultural Growers and Worker Advocates join forces](#)
- b. **Emerging Best Practice:** San Francisco’s [COVID-19 Decarceration Efforts](#)
- c. **BARHII Resource:** [Essential Worker Protections Recommendations](#)
- d. **Additional Resource:** California Local Health Department [Actions for Worker Health and Safety During COVID-19](#)

**4. Community-Based Mental Health:** On top of its physical health impacts, the pandemic has caused terrible collateral damage to mental health outcomes. It has driven isolation, trauma, economic instability, and violence, especially in the Black, Latinx, and Pacific Islander communities that face the highest infection risks and economic instability. Yet many of these communities do not have adequate or appropriate mental health services. Invest in mental health services for the most impacted, prioritizing prevention and response resources for the community-based organizations that know their communities the best. Ensure that resources reach essential workers (including the mental health workforce), domestic violence response, elder adults, and the Black, Latinx, and Pacific Islander communities and undocumented people who have been hit the hardest. Train and hire providers that reflect and know the diverse communities within the Bay Area. Invest in efforts to reduce stigma and connect mental health resources and outreach to basic needs like housing, food, and economic support.

Respond to mental health crisis and violence through alternatives to policing. Shift from trauma-informed care to healing-centered engagement. Support community-based crisis response teams to handle 911 calls related to homelessness, behavioral health crises, substance use, “quality-of-life concerns” and low-level community conflicts<sup>v</sup>. Support community-based, non-punitive violence interruption, staffed by people with past involvement in neighborhood violence.

- a. **BARHII Resource:** BARHII-Rise Together Webinar: [Mental Health Considerations for Equity](#)
- b. **Additional Resource:** California Pan-Ethnic Health Network’s: [The Right to Heal: Centering Mental Health Multi-Racial Equity in California \(Sept 22, 2021\)](#)
- c. **Emerging Best Practices:**
  - i. Richmond, California’s Office of Neighborhood Safety’s violence interruption program<sup>vi</sup>.
  - ii. CAHOOTS [Crisis Assistance in the Streets](#)

## Invest Directly to Rebuild Our Hardest Hit Communities

In addition to facing the highest disease burden during the pandemic, Black, Latinx, and Pacific Islander communities have been hit hard by the economic fallout of COVID-19. These communities are more likely to have elevated risks as essential workers, and to have suffered income loss on top of pre-pandemic economic inequities<sup>vii</sup>.



**5. Flexible Cash Assistance:** The movement for guaranteed income is growing rapidly across the country, driven by an emerging consensus that cash is the simplest and most powerful way to do the most good for the most people. Around \$35 million has been allocated in California that will flow through social services to provide guaranteed income for eligible pregnant people and young adults who recently aged out of foster care. Cities and counties are also using local and philanthropic funds to launch programs. Invest in guaranteed cash assistance programs that serve communities impacted by inequities—including Black, Latinx, and Pacific Islander communities, undocumented populations, and people released from incarceration. Provide flexible emergency financial assistance and “paid quarantine” wage replacement initiatives, and adopt measures to prevent garnishment of aid. Resources are especially needed to scale up pilots to show large-scale impact.

### a. Emerging Best Practices:

- i. Durham’s Guaranteed [Income Pilot for Formerly Incarcerated People](#)
- ii. City of Stockton [Guaranteed Income Program](#)
- iii. San Francisco’s [Pilot for pregnant Black & Pacific Islander individuals](#)
- iv. Santa Clara County’s [Basic Income Pilot Program for Transitioning Foster Youth](#)
- v. Oakland’s [Resilient Families Guaranteed Income Pilot](#)
- vi. [Economic Security Project](#)

## **6. Black, Latinx, and Pacific Islander-Led and Supporting Small Business and Employment Social Enterprise:**

Small businesses and social enterprises play crucial roles in Black, Latinx, and Pacific Islander communities, providing economic opportunity, relevant products, and important cultural hubs. Yet, small businesses in Black, Latinx, and Pacific Islander communities have had steeper revenue losses than other businesses, and many small businesses owned by (and employing and serving) people of color have been locked out of the Paycheck Protection Program<sup>viii</sup>. Invest in small businesses and social enterprises that are facing economic insecurity, including rental subsidies, and [simplified procurement processes that prioritize these businesses](#), especially those with deep roots in Black, Latinx, and Pacific Islander communities. Consider replication of San Francisco's redirection of savings from policing budgets to support Black small businesses.

### **a. Emerging Best Practices:**

- i. San Francisco's [African American Small Business Revolving Loan Fund](#)
- ii. National Association of Counties [Small Business Relief](#)
- iii. San Mateo County & City [Funds Match for Small Business Relief](#)
- iv. Occur's [Black Business Relief Fund](#)
- v. [Opportunity Fund](#)

## Ensure Housing is a Foundation for Wellbeing and Community Wealth

Decades of public health data demonstrate that access to stable, safe, and affordable housing is critical for well-being. Low-income residents who can comfortably afford their housing, for example, can spend almost five times as much on healthcare and a third more on food than their severely cost-burdened peers<sup>ix</sup>. The Bay Area's housing crisis is solvable but will require bold actions to protect households, preserve and improve housing we can afford, produce new affordable housing, and resource the communities that have faced long-standing housing discrimination.



**7. Rent, Mortgage, and Utility Relief:** Bay Area residents face unprecedented levels of housing insecurity, which has been exacerbated by pandemic-related income losses and health costs. And though California has allocated over \$7 billion in rental, mortgage, and utility relief, as of July, 2021, less than 10% has reached tenants<sup>x</sup>. Local jurisdictions can ensure that resources flow to those who need them most by targeting outreach and eligibility/scoring criteria to these communities, using tools like the [Urban Institute's Rental Assistance Priority Index](#), and reducing barriers like burdensome application and documentation requirements and language barriers.

a. **BARHII Resources:**

- i. [Preventing an Eviction Epidemic: Delivering Effective Emergency COVID-19 Rental Assistance in California](#)
- ii. Working Paper: [Local Strategies to Protect Tenants and Prevent Homelessness in Bay Area COVID-19 Emergency Rental Assistance Programs \(ERAPs\)](#)

**8. Black Housing Initiatives:** Black people have faced generations of inequitable policies and investments that drive deep inequities in housing costs, quality, and stability, as well as wealth-building opportunities. [Invest in a regional financing pool](#), developed by The Black Housing Advisory Taskforce (Black HAT), representing Black housing leaders across the Bay Area. This pool includes down payment assistance; predevelopment, acquisition, and rehabilitation funds; and an integrated capacity building program to increase staffing for Black-led housing and human development organizations. Support focused investments in local Black housing initiatives around the region [here](#).

**9. Legal Counsel, Outreach, and Education:** While California has recently passed additional protections and support for tenants, these protections will not keep people in their homes unless they are enforced, and people know about them. Legal counsel should be made accessible to all (including undocumented people), and outreach and education funded to ensure that everyone knows their rights and the assistance available to them.

a. **Emerging Best Practices:**

- i. [San Francisco established a “right to counsel” policy](#) in 2018 that guarantees a right to legal representation for all residents facing eviction.
- ii. Sonoma County’s [additional emergency pandemic legal assistance investments](#)
- iii. Contra Costa County’s [ERAP Comprehensive Implementation Grants](#)

**10. Land Trusts and Limited Equity Housing Models:** Land trusts and limited equity models can make housing permanently affordable by taking it off the market—allowing one-time funding to provide long-term financial and health benefits. Limited equity housing cooperatives (often paired with land trusts) allow households to build wealth as housing appreciates, while ensuring affordability for future residents. These models have succeeded in promoting housing stability and wealth-building and are currently building to scale. The influx of federal resources offers opportunities to demonstrate success, bring projects to scale, and provide long-term value. Land trusts can also be used for important purposes outside of housing, such as spaces for cultural work, community-building, and resilience. Prioritize investments in Black, Latinx, and Pacific Islander communities that have faced housing discrimination.

a. **Emerging Best Practice Models:**

- i. Vallejo’s [Housing Justice Coalition and Community Land Trust](#)
- ii. [Richmond LAND Community Land Trust](#)
- iii. [Oakland Community Land Trust](#)
- iv. [Segorea Te’ Lisjan Ohlone Land Trust](#)

# REGIONAL SOLUTIONS

This guide is focused on health equity investments that can be made by local jurisdictions. However, many of these priorities will require sustained and coordinated investment across Bay Area communities to yield strong results. For instance, the Bay Area’s housing conditions do not recognize county borders, and we need to work together toward a future of stable, affordable housing for everyone. Regional action is especially important to fight racial inequities in Black and Pacific Islander communities, whose members are dispersed throughout the region, and have often been excluded from political power. In doing so, we should apply the [principle of targeted universalism](#)—setting universal goals for all of our wellbeing and adopting targeted processes to achieve those goals. In this case, we can target investments to those that have been hit hardest by the COVID pandemic and longer-term health inequities.



BARHII is focused on two regional approaches that local jurisdictions can support:

- [The Bay Area Pacific Islander Task Force](#), which serves as an advisory council to health departments across the region and raises awareness of Pacific Islander health and social issues. Local governments can support the task force’s work by:
  - Investing in the task force’s work across the region
  - Ensureing local data is disaggregated to make Pacific Islander morbidity and mortality visible—in alignment with state law—including no longer suppressing smaller population data.
- [The Black Housing Advisory Taskforce \(Black HAT\)](#) represents Black housing leaders across the Bay Area, bringing together over 35 African American-led community-based organizations with expertise in housing development, housing finance, and Black economic development. This group is calling for [investments in a Regional Black Housing Finance Pool](#) to help Black communities stay and thrive in the Bay Area.

# BUILDING THE FUTURE

**We** must come together to create a shared future that is equitable and just. We look forward to partnering with you to implement the policy actions and investments described here to strengthen our collective well-being. We stand ready to support you in moving these priorities forward in your jurisdiction and connecting with other jurisdictions that are leading the way. To get help or to learn more about these priorities, please contact BARHII's Executive Director Melissa Jones at [mjones@barhii.org](mailto:mjones@barhii.org).



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