

- **Community health and wellness**

Mental and physical health challenges can and do affect community life, including economic development. For example, the opioid epidemic and other addiction problems are a growing concern nationwide, making it difficult for those affected to be actively engaged in employment and other economic activities. Also, there are important linkages between drug abuse and other mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, which can inhibit economic productivity. Physical health and mental health are also linked. Families struggling with mental and/or physical health challenges face greater barriers in attempting to be productive members of a community. And yet the relationship between health and economic activity is bi-directional: Communities lacking economic opportunity tend to have a greater proportion of their population struggle with mental and physical health challenges. Social factors such as living in poverty increases the risk of poor health. Given that healthy living habits are often formed in childhood, and that children progress through key developmental stages, which can influence their later health and economic outcomes, early childhood development is also a priority. The Center supports efforts to improve community capacity to encourage healthy lifestyle choices and discourage poor/risky health practices. The Center also supports efforts to insure healthcare access as well as access to healthy foods in rural communities.