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Go Slow to Move Fast: Best Practices for Engaging Community Leaders in a Transformative Strategic Plan

Logan Vetrovec

Virginia Commonwealth University

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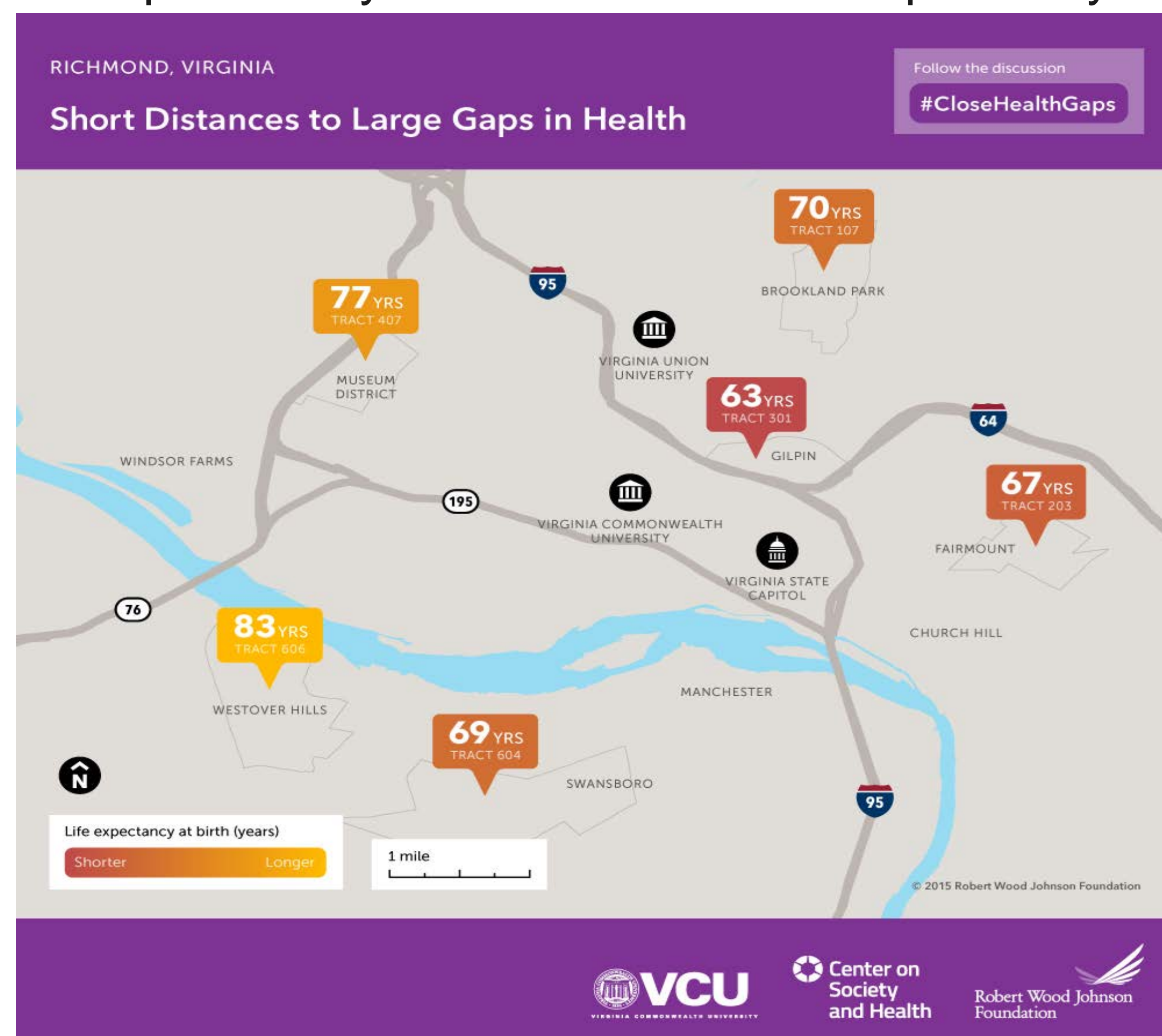
Logan Vetovec, M.Ed., Director of Campus-Community Partnerships, Office of the Vice President for Health Sciences
Anne Massey, MSW, Director of Sponsored Projects and Program Planning, Office of Health Innovation



What is the issue?

According to the World Health Organization, health equity is defined as the absence of avoidable, unfair, or remediable differences among groups of people, whether those groups are defined socially, economically, demographically or geographically or by other means of stratification. Social determinants of health are defined as the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age.

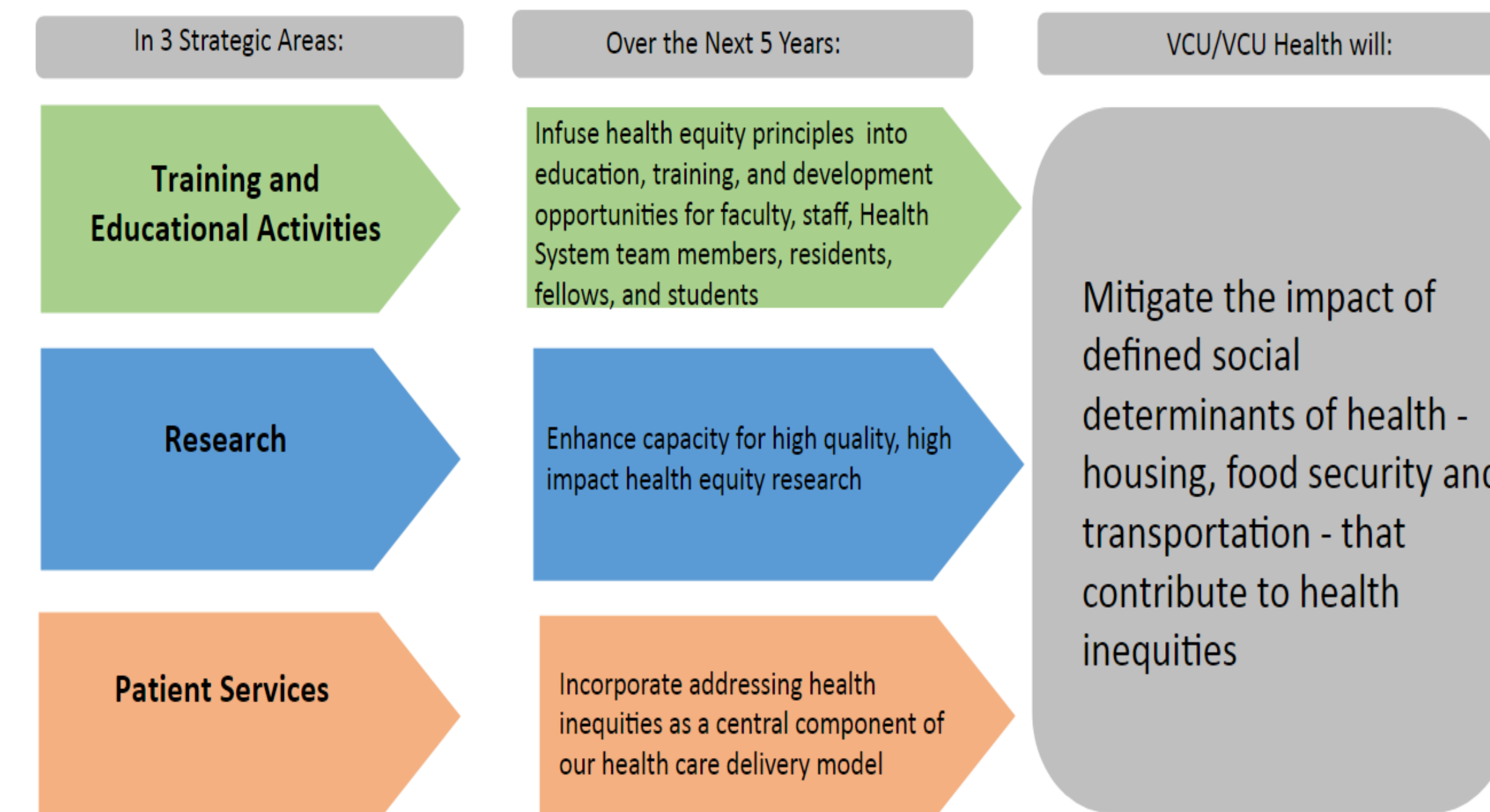
Key social determinants of health disproportionately affect the health and well-being of people who reside in the primary service areas of the VCU Health System. To that end, the map below illustrates that babies born within five miles of downtown Richmond face up to a 20 year difference in life expectancy.



Source: VCU Center for Society and Health. Chapman, Kelley, & Woolf (2015-2016). Life Expectancy Maps. Accessed from: <https://societyhealth.vcu.edu/work/products/>.

VCU, VCU Health System, and community partners have agreed to systematically address key social determinants of health through community-engaged interventions in education, patient services, and research over the next 5 years.

What is our approach?



2016: The Virginia Commonwealth University Health Equity Plan was developed to support the vision of improving the health of residents of the Greater Richmond, Virginia area.

2017: An internal Health Equity Task Force and related Work Groups reviewed, modified and finalized the strategic goals contained in the plan. Corresponding strategies and proposed activities were drafted to support these goals.

The Health Equity Strategic Plan was presented to and vetted with community members.

2018: A newly formed Steering Committee and Work Groups convened to focus on the implementation of the plan. These groups are comprised of VCU and VCUHS team members, community-based organization leaders and local residents. Each group has two co-chairs; one from VCU and one from a community organization.

What are the Lessons Learned?

- Strategic partnerships thrive when stakeholders create a shared management and monitoring structure and work together to address targeted social determinants of health at scale
- Data informs decision making and baseline data should be collected to confirm assumptions
- Community identified social determinants that impact the Richmond region – including food access, housing and transportation – provide the focus areas of our work
- Continuous community engagement is the primary driver of the VCU Health Equity Plan, as reflected in the following Guiding Principles:

Engagement of faculty, team members, residents, fellows and students in initiatives that create conditions to improve social determinants of health

Participation with the community through a collaborative approach to improve and enhance social and economic conditions

Provision of a shared decision-making process that honors the voices that represent VCU, VCU Health, community organizations and community residents

Development and maintenance of mutually beneficial relationships that recognize the expertise, values, and knowledge of all parties

Acknowledgements

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