



# **FROM THE START:**

## **Understanding the Social Determinants of Health**

August 20, 2025



**INSTITUTE FOR  
PUBLIC  
STRATEGIES**



# Meet the Presenters



**Meredith Gibson**  
Media/GIS Director



**David Shorey**  
Special Projects Manager







# INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC STRATEGIES

Mission: We work alongside communities to build power, challenge systems of inequity, protect health, and improve quality of life.

Vision: Safe, secure, vibrant and healthy communities where everyone can thrive.





# Learning Objectives

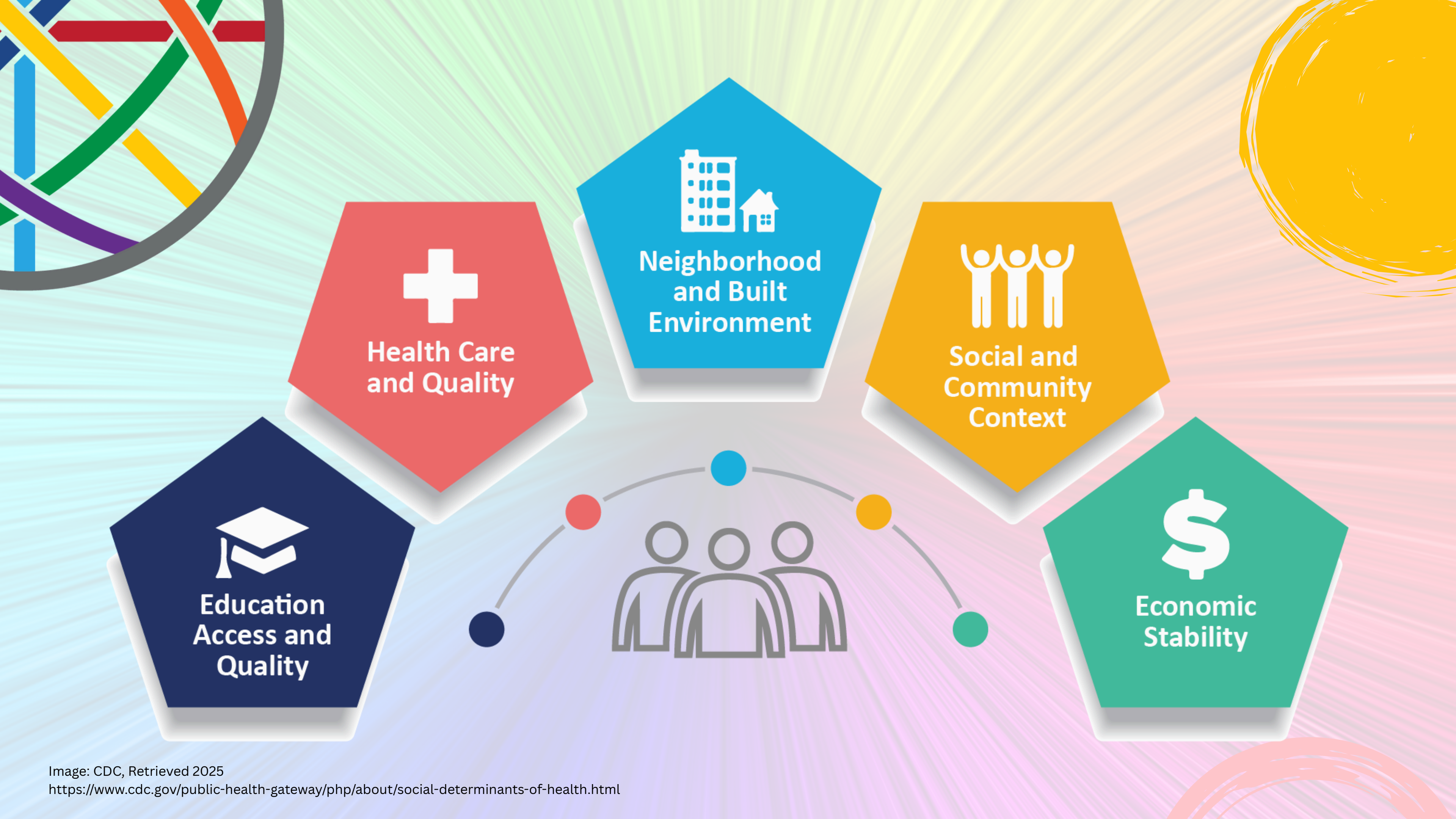
**Overview of the social determinants of health (SDOH)**

**Mapping the link between social conditions and health inequities**

**Taking an upstream prevention approach**

**Strategies to advance health equity through policy, systems and environmental (PSE) change**









## Education Access & Quality

- **More education** opens doors to health and opportunity.
- Schools teach important skills like problem-solving and healthy decision-making.
- **Less access** often means lower earnings and higher health risks.

### Vista Verde Student Journey



#### **Morning: Long Bus Ride**

Long commute before school



#### **School Day: Teacher Turnover**

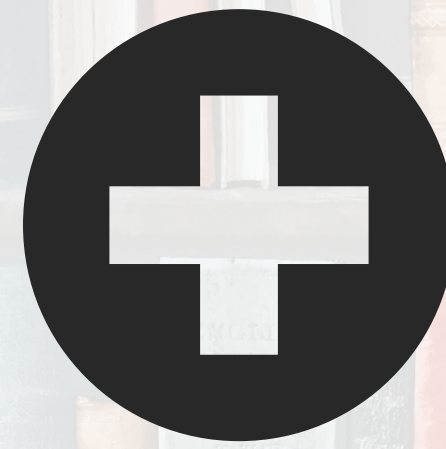
Frequent staff changes disrupt learning



#### **After School: Scarce Tutoring**

Limited academic support





## Health Care & Quality

- **Access** is about timely, affordable care.
- **Quality of care** is correct, respectful, and culturally competent.
- Cost, distance, and transportation barriers compound risk.

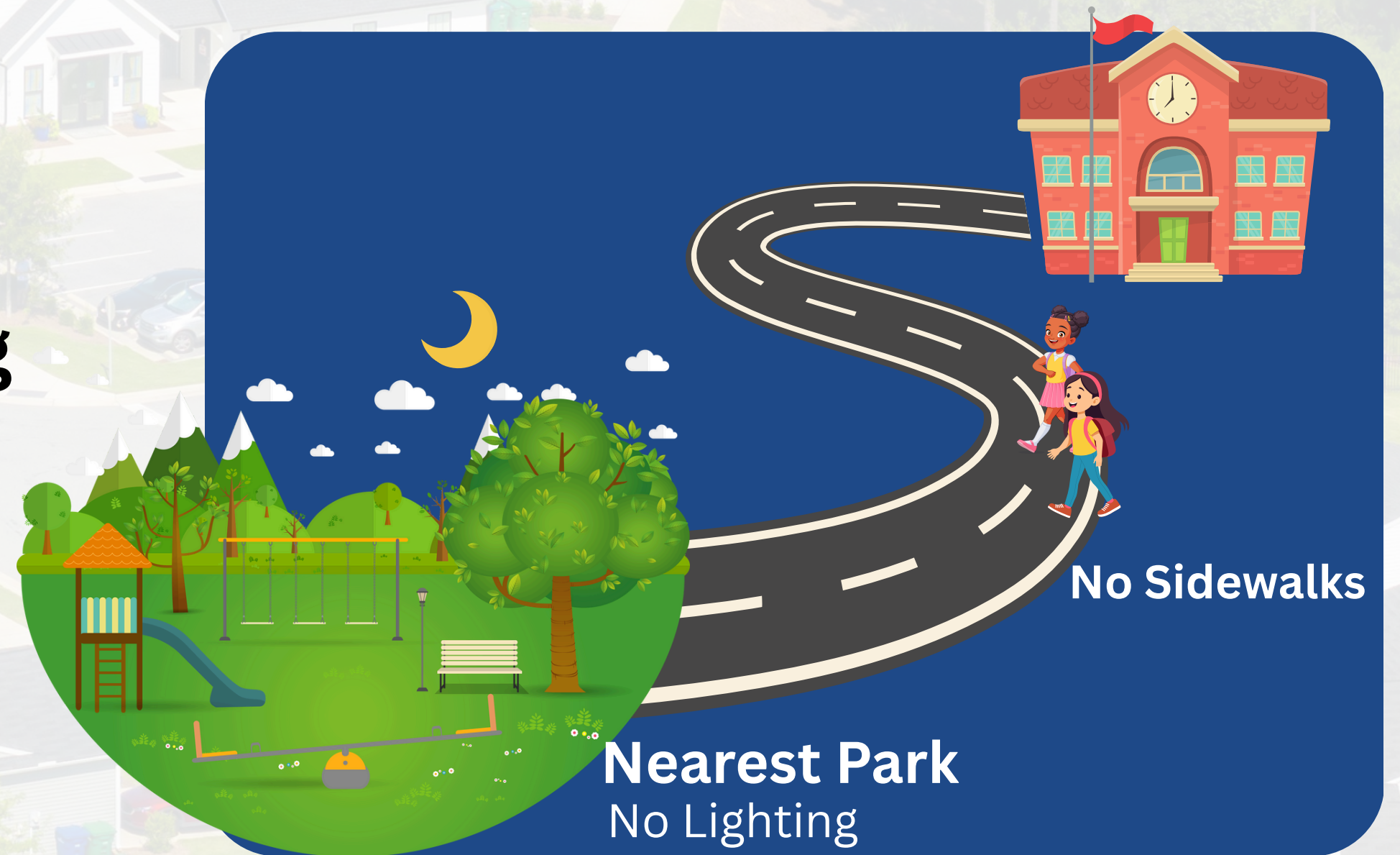






## Neighborhood & Built Environment

- **Safe neighborhoods** reduce crime, stress, and injury.
- **Clean air, water, and housing** prevent illness and disease.
- **Parks, sidewalks, and transportation** promote activity, connection, and access.







## Social & Community Context

- **Supportive relationships** reduce stress and increase resilience.
- **Belonging and fair treatment** build trust and health equity.
- **Community involvement** strengthens collaboration and improves social cohesion.



**Vista Verde community groups  
dissolved during the pandemic**

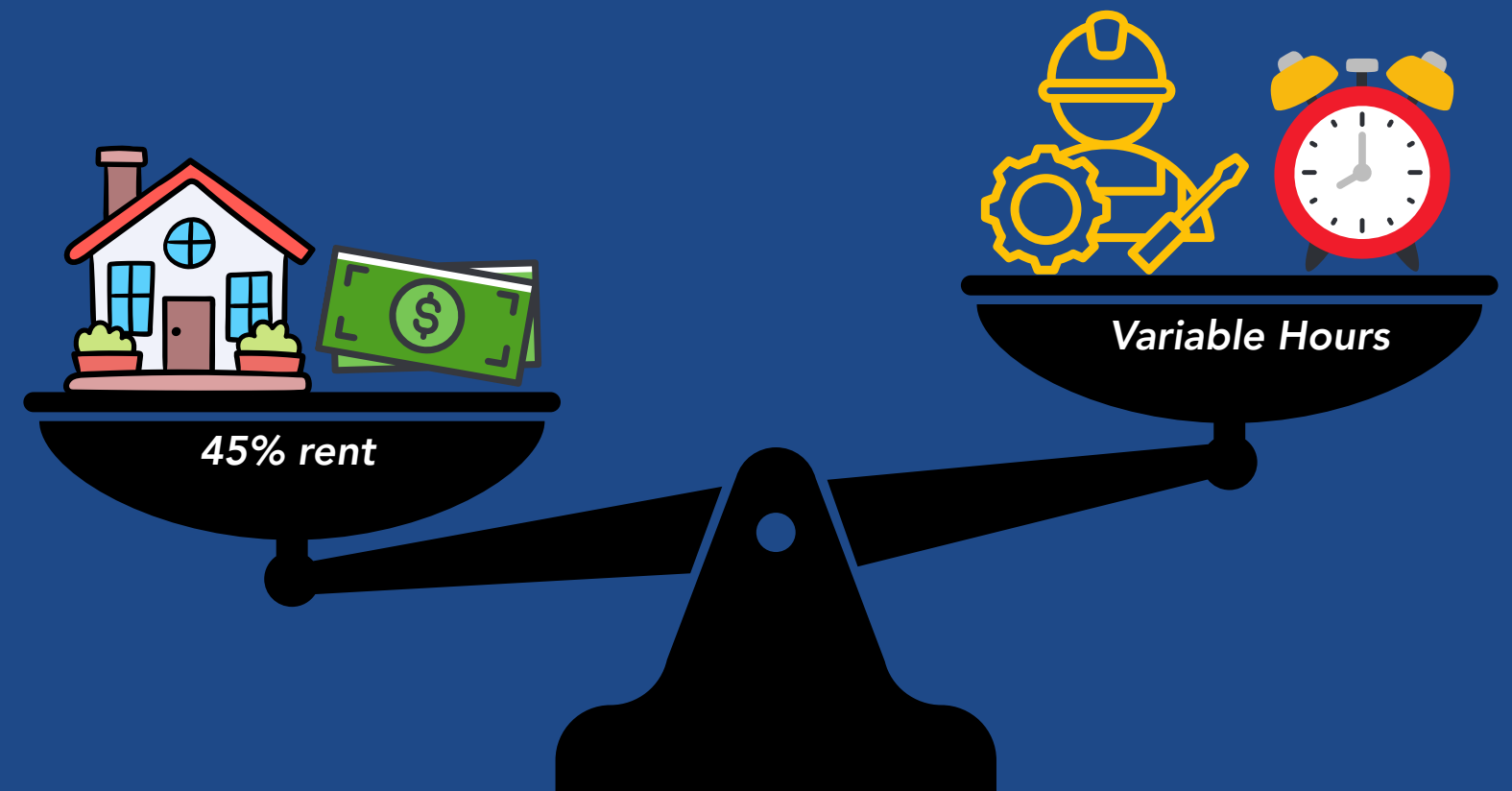




## Economic Stability

- **Income and jobs** stabilize access to basic needs.
- **Savings and financial management** protect against unexpected health costs.
- **Poverty and low wages** limit access to healthy living conditions and increase illness risk.

### Vista Verde Service Jobs & Rent Burden





# The Causes of the Causes

- Upstream factors → downstream health effects
- Policies, systems, environments shape choices
- **Example:** Zoning laws → grocery store availability → diet quality → chronic disease risk







Source of image: Brian Castrucci, [Health Affairs](#)



# Why Prevention Works

- **Fixes problems at the source** by looking at the main causes of health issues before they happen.
- **Saves money over time** by preventing expensive medical care and emergencies.
- **Helps people live healthier lives** with safer places, better resources, and more support.
- **Makes changes that last** by improving rules and systems that keep communities healthy for years to come.



# PSE Change

- **Policy:** Laws, regulations, rules
- **Systems:** Organizational processes & structures
- **Environmental:** Physical or built environment changes



# Examples of PSE Change

- **Housing:** Inclusionary zoning, rental assistance
- **Transportation:** Bike lanes, transit passes
- **Education:** Early childhood programs
- **Food Access:** Healthy corner store initiatives
- **Safety:** Violence prevention programs



# Multi-Sector Collaboration

- **Housing + Health Care:** Link clinics and housing for affordable homes, services.
- **Transportation + Food Access:** Add transit routes to groceries and farmers' markets.
- **Education + Jobs:** Partner schools and businesses for steady job training.
- **Safety + Community Involvement:** Improve lighting, safe spaces, and community events.
- **Environment + Exercise:** Expand sidewalks, bike lanes, and green spaces.



# Assessments to Ensure Equity

Health Equity Impact Assessment (HEIA)



Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA)

Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA)



Equity Scorecards or Dashboards



# What Can You Do?



**Apply an SDOH lens to your work**



**Build partnerships**



**Advocate for PSE changes**



**Center equity in all decisions**



# References

- Healthy People 2030 SDOH:  
[www.health.gov/healthypeople](http://www.health.gov/healthypeople)
- Centers for Disease Control SDOH:  
[www.cdc.gov/socialdeterminants](http://www.cdc.gov/socialdeterminants)
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation:  
[www.rwjf.org](http://www.rwjf.org)
- County Health Rankings:  
<https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/>



# Thank You!

## David Shorey

Special Projects Manager  
dshorey@publicstrategies.org

## Meredith Gibson

Media/GIS Director  
mgibson@publicstrategies.org

## FOLLOW US

on our social networks



@Institute for Public Strategies



# Survey

(Thank you!)



**IPS Training and  
Technical Assistance:**

[info@publicstrategies.org](mailto:info@publicstrategies.org)



Q & A