

Negotiating a Well-Being Portfolio

Thousands of multi-sector partnerships are working to enhance well-being in cities, counties, and other regions across the country. Some of the most ambitious ventures engage large numbers of residents and other constituents, all of whom are legitimate stewards of their common system and may work to steer it in a new direction.

When diverse actors come together across sectors and backgrounds, it can be difficult to see connections; and it can be even harder to think through how changes in one area may play out to affect others over time. Harnessing the power of multi-sector partners to act as true system stewards is one of the most pressing—and promising—frontiers of the field.

With a wider ecosystem view, leaders may spot many places to act, and then consider how they connect. For example, the following diagram shows how three complementary dynamics combine to shape the character of the entire ecosystem over time.

Dimensions of the Health Ecosystem

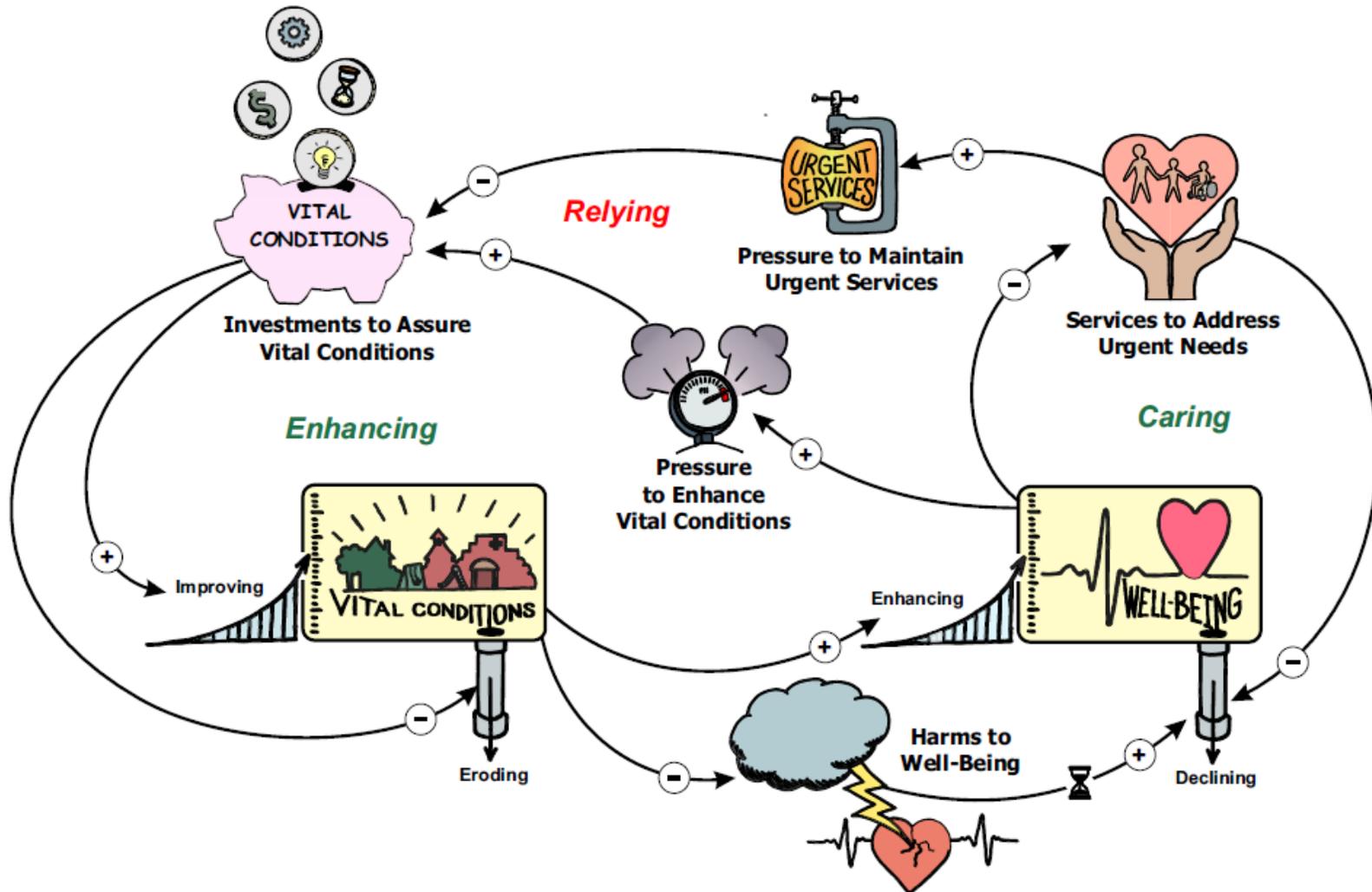


- **Enhancing:** Well-being depends on a consistent set of vital conditions such as stable housing, healthy food, clean air, and others. If any of those conditions erode, a variety of harms will predictably arise, which in turn will drive the demand for urgent services to restore well-being. Investments to assure vital conditions through education, living wages, safer neighborhoods, routine health care, and others can not only enhance well-being, but also prevent harm and avert the need for costly, often inequitable urgent services.
- **Caring:** Whenever well-being declines, a powerful caring response kicks in to address urgent needs, such as acute care for illness or injury, food assistance, shelter, addiction treatment, and others. When faced with excess demand or resource constraints, each service industry may find ways to improve accessibility, effectiveness, and efficiency.
- **Relying:** Several competing pressures govern whether there is greater reliance on delivering urgent services or investing in vital conditions. Both are necessary, and the particular mix depends on how leaders contend with pressures that are politically contested and constantly in flux. To break from business as usual, system stewards must build enough civic muscle to shift the combined portfolio. For instance, underinvestment or conscious divestment in vital conditions will generate persistent need for urgent services along with related pressure to maintain them. Conversely, mounting harms and overstretched service industries will amplify pressure to enhance vital conditions.

Understanding and mapping these dynamics of a changing ecosystem may better equip leaders to enhance Well-Being in its fullest sense.

This is a work-in-progress and remains open to evolve with input.

Dynamics of the Health Ecosystem



Legend:

Rectangles represent current states of well-being and vital conditions

Ramps depict the rate of inflow into current conditions; drains represent the rate of outflow

Arrows are causal connections, with a positive or negative direction. Positive links move in the same direction (i.e., if one element goes up or down, so will the other); whereas negative links travel in the opposite direction (i.e., if the first element rises, then the other element falls, and vice versa).

Definitions of a Well-Being Portfolio

The Portfolio Imperative

No single actor, nor even an entire sector, can sustain well-being for a whole population. The work requires contributions from virtually every quarter, if only to contend with the sheer variety of massively entangled threats and opportunities.

Negotiating Priorities

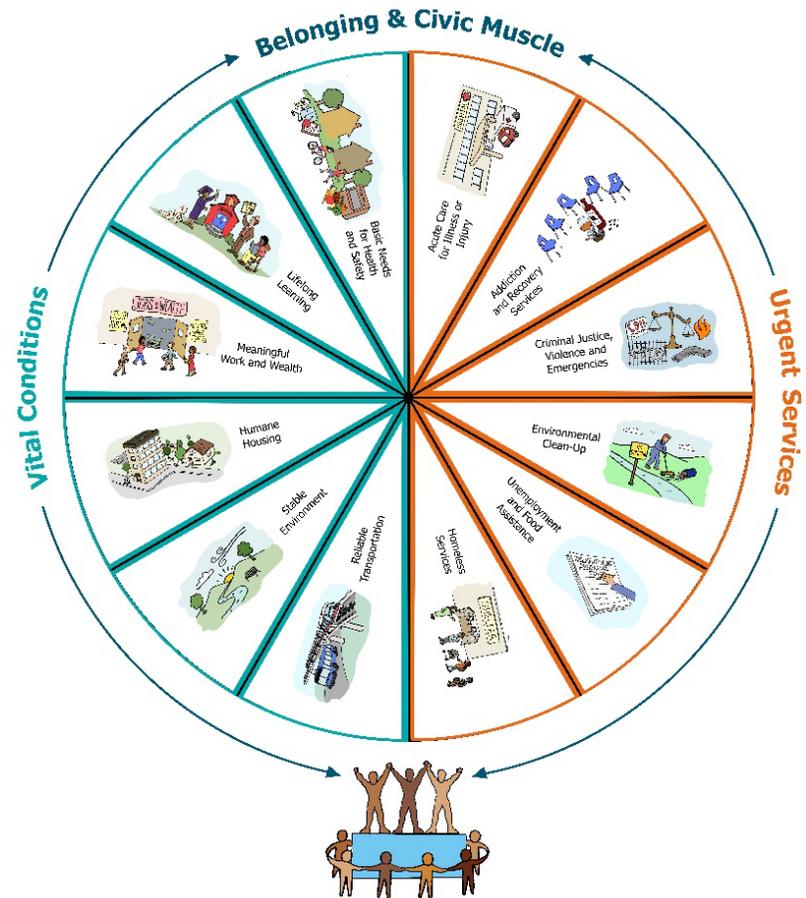
Veteran practitioners understand that even if all parties agree on common ends, they may disagree—sometimes forcefully—about the best means. This pragmatic need to negotiate contested priorities is both unavoidable and a perpetual challenge because priorities often shift under new circumstances.

All regions have a portfolio in play, whether acknowledged or not. It is enshrined in the way resources flow, and animated by prevailing ideas about what ought to be done, by whom, with whom, and in what amounts.

ReThinkers with a wide-angle, ecosystem view know that a sound portfolio must maintain a delicate mix of positions, including investments to assure vital conditions, services to address urgent needs, as well as efforts to strengthen belonging and civic muscle. Thinking through the many potential combinations and consequences could help when negotiating where to direct—or redirect—priorities.

Below is an initial menu of options in each category.

Portfolio Elements *Investments in Vital Conditions, Urgent Services, and Belonging/Civic Muscle*



Investments to Assure Vital Conditions <i>Properties of places and institutions that all people need all the time to be healthy and well.</i>			Services to Address Urgent Needs <i>Services that anyone under adversity may need temporarily to regain or restore health and well-being.</i>		
	Basic Needs for Health and Safety	<i>Basic requirements for health and safety</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate air and water • Nutritious food • Routine physical activity • Sufficient sleep • Safe, satisfying sexuality and reproduction • Freedom from crime, injury, violence, traumatic stress, and addiction • Routine health care (physical and mental) 		Acute Care for Illness or Injury	<i>Acute and post-acute care for physical and mental illness</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency medical services • Acute hospitalization • Trauma-informed care
	Lifelong Learning	<i>Continuous learning, education, and literacy</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive, social, emotional abilities • Early childhood experiences • Elementary and high school • Higher education • Career and adult education 		Addiction and Recovery Services	<i>Services to address mental health and recovery needs</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavioral health care • Substance abuse treatment and support • Inpatient and outpatient services for substance abuse and mental illness
	Meaningful Work and Wealth	<i>Rewarding work, careers, and standards of living</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job training/retraining • Good-paying, fulfilling jobs • Family and community wealth • Savings and limited debt 		Criminal Justice, Violence and Emergencies	<i>Efforts to maintain public safety and fairly adjudicate violations of the law</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police and fire departments • First response teams, e.g. 911 dispatch, suicide hotlines, poison control • The criminal justice system

Investments to Assure Vital Conditions <i>Properties of places and institutions that all people need all the time to be healthy and well.</i>			Services to Address Urgent Needs <i>Services that anyone under adversity may need temporarily to regain or restore health and well-being.</i>		
	Humane Housing	<i>Humane, consistent housing</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate space per person • Safe structure • Affordable costs • Diverse neighborhood (without gentrification, segregation, concentrated poverty) • Close to work, school, food, recreation/nature 		Homeless Services	<i>Short-term housing for the homeless</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency shelters
	Stable Environment	<i>Sustainable natural resources and freedom from climate hazards</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean air, water, soil • Natural spaces • Freedom from extreme heat, flooding, wind, radiation, earthquakes 		Environmental Clean-Up	<i>Efforts to clean up hazards in air, water, soil, homes, workplaces, and communities</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead abatement • Water treatment • Brownfield decontamination
	Reliable Transportation	<i>Reliable, safe, and accessible transportation</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close to work, school, food, leisure • Safe transport • Active transport • Efficient energy use • Few environmental hazards 		Unemployment and Food Assistance	<i>Assistance for those who are disadvantaged, out of work or disabled</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federally supported programs for disadvantaged families (TANF, SNAP, WIC) • Food Banks • Energy Assistance • Childcare Assistance

Note: There may be complicated cascades where certain vital conditions prevent harms, and those harms are themselves conditions that prevent other harms.

Efforts to Strengthen Belonging & Civic Muscle

Sense of belonging and power to shape a common world



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- Arts, culture, and spiritual life
- Social support
- Freedom from stigma, discrimination, oppression
- Support for civil rights, human rights
- Civic agency, engagement (voting, volunteer, public work)
- Collective efficacy
- Non-profit organizations
- Civic science
- Transparency
- Communications, information technology, and social networking
- Politics and partisan discourse