

For Immediate release:  
October 29, 2020

Contact:  
Andrew Mangini  
519-598-6324

## **Alliance for Better Health's CONVERGE Conference Provides Forum for Reimagining Region's Health**

*Thought leaders in the fields of health care, economics, and public policy discussed new approaches to health in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*

**TROY, NY** – Alliance for Better Health yesterday hosted CONVERGE: Reimagining Health – Together. The virtual conference created a dynamic space for thought leaders in the fields of health care, public policy, and economics to consider new and alternative approaches to keeping people healthy. The overarching takeaway: we're only at the beginning of the journey toward understanding the needs of our community, but no one can do it alone. We are better together – we always will be. A recording of the virtual conference can be accessed [here](#).

The virtual conference consisted of three separate panel discussions, touching upon major topics relative to social determinants of health – particularly how COVID-19 has exacerbated social needs and inequities, what partnerships we are seeing that promote health equity, and ultimately, what can be done to achieve healthy communities. Panelists at the event included representatives from the Capital Region's leading health plans, hospitals, community-based organizations, Troy Mayor Patrick Madden, Schenectady Mayor Gary McCarthy, and Albany Mayor Kathy Sheehan.

"We're building things on the fly here – mistakes will be made; lessons will be learned. But there are a number of things we're looking at that we need to strategically think differently about...The reverberations of COVID will be well lasting beyond just the scope of the pandemic. If we don't address these necessary preventative medicine interventions now, when it's difficult, the health issues that may be facing our communities in the future could be significant... We need to get creative," said Pantelis Karnoupakis, VP of Value Based Initiatives at Fidelis Care, while discussing social needs in the time of a pandemic.

The second panel touched upon health equity and what can be done, particularly what partnerships should be curated, to reach it. Mike Saccocio, Chief Executive Director at City Mission of Schenectady, explained that we often overlook the necessity of *social* capital. “Most importantly, our biggest contribution is empowering people with life experience – people who have lived in under-resourced communities, people who presently live in under-resourced communities, who can identify with the struggles of people who need health care but aren't accessing it, who don't trust the system,” said Saccocio.

Mayor Kathy Sheehan offered her vision of what a healthy community looks like – and more importantly, how we get there, in the last panel, describing, “When we think about what we need to do to create healthy, equitable communities, I think we need to first start by acknowledging all of us bring biases and emotions to the table when we talk about poverty. Until we acknowledge those and pass through those, I think sometimes we just get caught up in all the reasons why not to do something.”

In his keynote address, Health Economist Dr. Len Nichols emphasized what the panelists described. “There is no place in the country that has enough investment upstream to the health care system,” said Nichols. He went on to describe the Collaborative Approach to Public Goods Investment (CAPGI) model, detailed in his [Health Affairs](#) article, as the answer to the inequities and issues we are experiencing.

Closing remarks came from Alliance's CEO, Jacob Reider, MD, reminding attendees that the conference was not just an event, but a start of a process to a better tomorrow for our communities. “Let's write the next chapter. This isn't about witnessing history, it's about creating it,” Reider said.

For a more in-depth recap on the virtual conference, read the [AJMC article](#).

###