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## **ReThink Health Publishes First-Ever “Pulse Check” Survey on the State of Shared Stewardship for Thriving Together Across America**

***Nearly 350 contributors from businesses, community nonprofits, hospitals, and public health agencies provide insights about the state of stewardship values, priorities, and practices***

[View the report on ReThink Health’s interactive microsite](#)

May 12, 2022 (Morristown, NJ) - The Rippel Foundation’s ReThink Health initiative today published the [2021 Pulse Check on Shared Stewardship for Thriving Together Across America](#), the first and only nationwide survey to examine stewardship values, priorities, and practices. Findings reveal the extent to which individuals and organizations in pivotal positions are thinking and acting like stewards of an equitable, thriving future. Fielded from October 2020 to July 2021, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the survey provides rare and timely insights about what changemakers across the country think it takes to thrive together during a time of significant threat and opportunity.

Stewards are people and organizations who work together to create conditions that everyone needs to thrive, beginning with those who are struggling and suffering. Shared stewardship is not a new idea, but it has yet to become a common practice. Instead, siloed services, short-sighted investments, and band-aid solutions are often the norm, creating barriers to lasting systemic change. It is through shared stewardship that individuals, organizations, and communities can work in coordination to expand the vital conditions that all people and places need for health and well-being, including basic needs for health and safety, humane housing, opportunities for meaningful work and lifelong learning, a healthy environment, and, central to all of these, a strong sense of belonging and civic muscle.

The Pulse Check was led by ReThink Health, in partnership with the RAND Corporation, with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Rippel. It reflects perspectives from 348 contributors across eight organization types (including city and county public health departments, hospitals, business associations, and nonprofit organizations focused on the environment, food, housing, faith and social justice, as well as multisector partnerships), all selected from a nationally representative sample of places across the country.

The study explores the following questions:

- To what extent do changemakers across America endorse stewardship **values**?
- What are their **priorities** for investment and action?
- How fully are stewardship **practices** incorporated as organizational norms?
- What kind of **obstacles and momentum builders** shape the path forward toward an equitable, thriving future?

Overall, the findings show a notable, though still incomplete, nationwide commitment to create an equitable system for ensuring health and well-being. About a third of the contributors stand out as relatively stronger stewards, and the remaining two thirds can significantly strengthen their stewardship stance through greater consistency in their values, priorities, and practices. (Read about the [stewardship diffusion score](#) for a more detailed explanation of these measures.)

“Stewardship is a simple concept that has been around for generations, one that is broader than leadership or governance. To advance the north star goal of everyone thriving together with no exceptions, we have to work together in very different ways. Stewardship is about just that—thinking and acting in ways that will create thriving, equitable communities for our children, grandchildren, and generations to come,” said Pulse Check co-author **Jane Erickson, Director of Learning and Impact at the Rippel Foundation and ReThink Health**. “Our big takeaway, and what we hope others see in this report, is that to make stewardship the de-facto way of working together, we must both deepen and scale stewardship. That is how we can create a future in which everyone can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.”

### **Report Highlights:**

#### ***Stewardship Values***

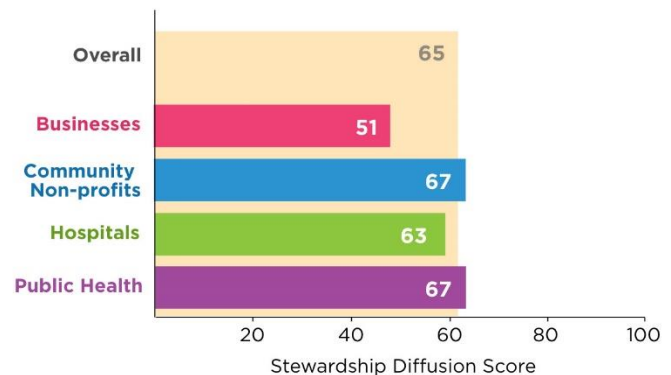
Contributors expressed near universal agreement on three core stewardship values related to purpose, power, and wealth. Across every subgroup studied, more than 90% affirmed that:

- Purpose in life must be larger than both oneself and one’s organization (95% agree)
- Every person should feel they have power to help shape the world they live in (99% agree)
- People and organizations should use their wealth to create conditions where all people can thrive (92% agree)

Additionally, the vast majority of participants see the multiple crises of 2020 as catalysts for system change. Across sectors, fewer than 10% of respondents said that their hope is that there would be a return to “business as usual,” while more than 90% said their hopes are for “major changes in America’s system of economic, racial or social priorities” or “improving projects and programs to fulfill unmet needs.”

But, the Pulse Check revealed a significant disconnect: While most contributors (73%) see the multiple crises of 2020-2021 as an opportunity for serious, systemic change in America’s system of economic, social, or racial

**How much has stewardship diffused across key sectors? (n=348)**



Numbers may be less than 100, as some chose “not applicable” or skipped the question. See Appendix 3 for details.

priorities, a much smaller fraction (26%) say that system change is their organization's most important goal—reflecting a large gap between aspirations for system change and concrete action toward that goal.

***Stewardship Priorities:***

- 43% favor investing more resources among those with the most to gain—those who have been systematically denied equal opportunities—as opposed to investing more among those who need just a little more help (29%) or evenly and equally among all groups (27%). Those latter alternatives are charitable ways of helping people, but they aren't designed to change the system that favors certain people and places while neglecting or harming others.
- 44% of the highest priorities for investment and action focused on expanding long-term vital conditions, compared to 32% for urgent services, even during a time of national crisis with increased adversity and acute needs.

***Stewardship Practices:***

- 94% agree that working collaboratively is the best way for their organizations to achieve maximum impact, versus going it alone. Yet, only 38% view working relationships as highly effective across organizations in their community.
- Over 90% rated their own stewardship practices highly, but fewer than 50% made the same assessment of other organizations in their community.
- Most contributors felt that efforts to collaborate within their own organization type are well aligned but that alignment with other organization types is lower. For example, respondents from public health departments reported strong alignment with other public health organizations (71%) but reported much lower alignment with hospitals (45%) and social justice organizations (11%).

These differences may reflect a true distinction between organizations, a weak understanding of what others are doing, a tendency to overestimate the strength of one's own involvement—or a combination of all three. Regardless, the findings indicate a likely gap between belief in the value of collaboration versus the quality and consistency of actual collaboration.

Additionally, despite widespread agreement about the need to place greater value on longer-term progress, respondents across sectors noted that setting long-term priorities was the practice least likely to be implemented.

A significant majority of respondents (82%) cited a lack of financial resources as the major barrier to advancing equitable well-being in their communities.

“While resource constraints are real for many organizations, efforts to get more money often come at the expense of investing existing resources more equitably or effectively,” said Erickson. “A scarcity mindset is common across sectors; fortunately, nearly half of the Pulse Check contributors say that outcomes can be improved by using existing resources more creatively.”

“It is heartening to see such strong affirmation of core stewardship ideals,” said Pulse Check co-author **Bobby Milstein, Director of System Strategy at the Rippel Foundation and ReThink Health**. “However, these espoused ideals stand in contrast to the daily lived reality in communities across America, one that is often marked by extreme individualism and organizational fragmentation, by feelings of powerlessness, and by a scramble for scarce resources alongside escalating wealth inequality. Stewardship is rooted in the understanding that purpose needs to be larger than yourself, power should be shared, and resources should be invested to ensure

everyone can thrive together. For communities to thrive, stewardship must fully take hold in our heads, hearts, and hands. Savvy stewards can and must work together across typical boundaries to design a system that will create a better, more equitable America.”

***About The Rippel Foundation’s ReThink Health Initiative***

*ReThink Health is the flagship initiative of The Rippel Foundation, which is dedicated to fostering equitable health and well-being for all. ReThink Health discovers and shares what it takes to thrive together through shared stewardship and continually explores how to achieve equitable system change in real-world settings. Together with partners and co-investors, ReThink Health works with health care organizations, foundations, corporations, government institutions, and change agents throughout the United States to guide thinking and action that inspire innovative system transformation and to promote shared stewardship as a rising norm. For more information, visit [www.rippel.org](http://www.rippel.org).*