



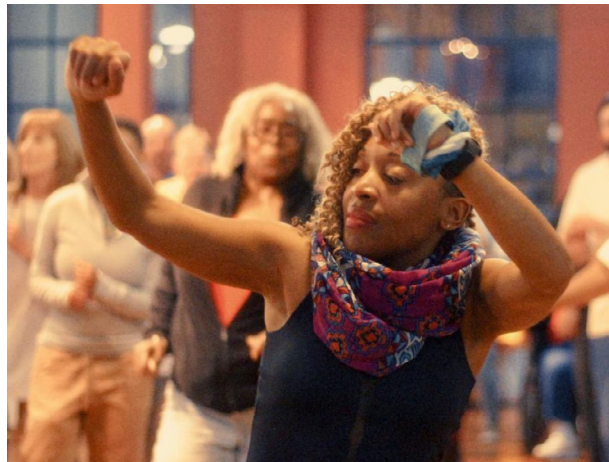
American Heart Association®
Social Impact Funds



SHOWCASE

Open Source Wellness

Community as Medicine Model Powers Health by Connection



In 2016, psychologists Dr. Elizabeth Markle and Dr. Ben Emmert-Aronson of Open Source Wellness asked a bold question:

What if behavior change prescriptions were treated as seriously as antibiotics?

Too often, patients were told to “exercise more” or “reduce stress” without support. For low income communities especially, these prescriptions became setups for shame and disengagement.

Their answer was **Community as Medicine® (CAM)**, a model where people don’t just talk about health, they practice it together. Through movement, nourishment, connection and mindfulness guided by a health coach or peer, a member of the community with lived experience, participants experience joy while building habits that strengthen emotional and physical well-being — key contributors to heart and brain health.

The impact is profound: patients once at risk of disengagement are now prescribed joyful, community based programs that improve health outcomes.

Studies find that participants from July 2024 to August 2025 experienced significant mental & physical health improvement:

↓ **55% reduction**
in depression

↓ **25% reduction**
in loneliness

↑ **20% increase**
in daily servings
of fruit & vegetables

↑ **16% increase**
in weekly minutes
of exercise

Scaling to a Training & Licensing Powerhouse

With early grassroots pilots in Alameda County, California, the program proved transformative. But scaling requires resources. That's where the Social Impact Funds stepped in. Funding enabled the organization to evolve from a scrappy direct service team into a training and licensing powerhouse.

- **Facilitator Training:** Funding supported the creation of hybrid learning modules, combining film, instructional design and live practice, that now prepare health coaches nationwide to deliver CAM group sessions in their communities.
- **YMCA Partnerships:** With guidance from a former YMCA executive, Community as Medicine is bridging the clinic community divide. YMCAs across the country are partnering with federally qualified health centers to deliver HIPAA compliant, culturally relevant programs.
- **Scalable Innovation:** What began as bespoke, resource intensive training is now shifting to modular, asynchronous formats, allowing organizations to onboard at scale.

Beyond individual impact, clinics are able to double their productivity through group medical visits, while YMCAs expand their reach beyond intergenerational groups of adults ages 18 to focus on new populations including Cantonese speaking elders in San Francisco and women over 65 in Minneapolis. Others are exploring adapting Community As Medicine to youth populations and other possible business models.

As Open Source Wellness's Community as Medicine model grows from a program into a movement, participants are transforming their lives, together.

The Open Source Wellness Community as Medicine model is growing from a program to a movement.



Explore the Breakthroughs Transforming Health and Opportunity for All.

Learn more about how the Social Impact Funds are catalyzing solutions that improve lives and communities.

Sign up to stay connected with us.

The **Social Impact Funds** are part of American Heart Association Ventures, the group that leads and coordinates the venture capital programs of the American Heart Association. heart.org/SocialImpactFunds

