

# IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH BY COMBATting HOUSING SHORTAGES AND DISPLACEMENT

## *BUILD Fourth Plain, Vancouver, WA*



### POWERED BY

The  
**BUILD  
HEALTH**  
Challenge®

#### BOLD

Ensure government agencies use equity-driven practices—such as a Community Investment Trust—to combat involuntary displacement and increase affordable housing



#### UPSTREAM

Address housing affordability and stability, along with unhealthy and/or unsafe living conditions, to reduce toxic stress and associated health problems for Fourth Plain families



#### INTEGRATED

Compensate and connect more effectively with small, local, BIPOC-led organizations to ensure their voices are represented in Fourth Plain's work



#### LOCAL

Identify and build capacity of resident leaders through advocacy, leadership, and community development training



#### DATA-DRIVEN

Develop a comprehensive database using school, housing, and mental health data so partners can track indicators to inform continuing strategy

### IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



### COMMUNITY IMPACT



Advocacy efforts helped enact 3 housing policies focused on just cause protections, legal representation for tenants, and rent increases



\$650,000+ infused into Fourth Plain small business corridor to keep BIPOC-owned business afloat during COVID-19 closures



Broke ground on new 100+ unit affordable housing complex with mixed-use ground floor, designed by and for residents

## INTRODUCTION

Deanna, a resident of the Fourth Plain corridor in Vancouver, Washington, is elderly, has significant health issues, and uses a wheelchair. She rents a mobile home in one of the mobile home parks that dot this area, which is a stone's throw from Portland, Oregon. Lacking a car, computer, and internet access, Deanna has been isolated from the rest of the community, most severely during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lacking equity in her home, Deanna also has been threatened by developers looking for affordable land on which to build expensive condos in this desirable suburb of Portland. Many Fourth Plain residents have stories like Deanna's, often with added language and cultural barriers and the pressures of child and elder care. Low-income families who are stretched thin financially and renting unusually scarce housing—Vancouver has less than a 2 percent vacancy rate<sup>1</sup> compared to a national rate of nearly 6 percent—are vulnerable when rents rise. At the mercy of the constrained market, Fourth Plain families are often out of options and suffer major physical and mental health setbacks as a result.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.census.gov/housing/hvs/data/q122ind.html>

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vancouver,\\_Washington](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vancouver,_Washington)

<sup>3</sup> American Community Survey 2020 (5-year estimates data profiles), <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/>

## BACKGROUND

Vancouver is a city on the north bank of the Columbia River. Located in Clark County, Vancouver is just under 10 miles from Portland, Oregon, and increasingly serves as a suburb of Portland. The city's population of about 200,000 people makes it the fourth-largest city in Washington state.<sup>2</sup>

The Fourth Plain area—locally known as the International District for the more than 30 languages spoken there—includes neighborhoods north and south of Fourth Plain Boulevard in central Vancouver. Fourth Plain neighborhoods were first developed as housing for shipbuilders during World War II, and became a landing area for communities of color and immigrants. The Boulevard is a busy thoroughfare with diverse businesses like hair salons and insurance companies serving the many cultures and countries of origin represented by the approximately 20,000 residents of Fourth Plain. Those neighborhoods include the highest percentage of Hispanic/Latino, Asian, Eastern European, and foreign-born residents in the county, with about 25 percent identifying as Latino and 16 percent as other non-white races.<sup>3</sup>



*Displacement from your home and community can have a profound impact on your mental health and well-being.—Lauren Henricksen, Clark County Public Health*

The diverse and bustling Fourth Plain has historically been challenged, despite its long-term diversity. The end of WWII caused job loss and the flight of residents in search of work, and the construction of highway SR500, which cuts horizontally through



Fourth Plain, led to significant neighborhood deterioration that has impacted residents through today. The safety of infrastructure like sidewalks is compromised and the area experiences higher crime rates, combined with what some characterize as over-policing, leading to an overall less safe environment. Recent data show that over 20 percent of residents have not earned a high school diploma, compared to 11 percent for the city of Vancouver as a whole. The average household income is only 60 percent of Vancouver's median income, with one-quarter of Fourth Plain residents living below the federal poverty line.<sup>4</sup> Unemployment in the area is more than twice the national rate—7.8 percent compared to 3.6 percent—and 20 percent are uninsured.<sup>5</sup>

*No matter how much development is coming in, the need is outpacing the supply. People are always moving to Portland and Fourth Plain is a suburb and people are leaving Portland because it's getting too expensive.*  
—Heather Cochrun, Evergreen Habitat for Humanity



Very scarce housing is one of Vancouver's most pressing problems and certainly one that affects Fourth Plain residents, who are particularly financially vulnerable. Housing prices are high and the rental market is tight due to low stock, little land to develop, and movement into the area from Portland. The Fourth Plain area is bisected by the I-5 highway and its proximity to the I-5 corridor, along with the ever-increasing search by Portlanders for more affordable housing, makes the Fourth Plain desirable to developers and house flippers. The area is seeing gentrification in historically multicultural neighborhoods, where longer-term residents are priced out of the single-family homes which make up the majority of available housing. But over 70 percent of Vancouver households

rent, and over one-third are severely rent-burdened.<sup>6</sup> Adding major stress is the fact that Washington state has few tenant protections, allowing landlords to issue no-cause evictions with 60 days notice.

Across the board, residents experience a higher number of health problems than in other areas of Clark County. Nearly 15 percent of Fourth Plain adults—twice the national rate—have asthma, likely due in part to mold in the aging housing stock because of the wet climate.<sup>7</sup> Notably, 27 percent of Fourth Plain adults are diagnosed with depression—over three times the national prevalence.<sup>8</sup> For those who are housing-insecure, who face eviction and homelessness if their rent increases by just \$100 per month, the rate of depression is even higher.

<sup>4</sup> American Community Survey 2020 (5-year estimates data profiles), <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/>

<sup>5</sup> Local Area Unemployment Statistics 2020, <https://bls.gov/lau/>

<sup>6</sup> In Vancouver, 37 percent of renters surveyed say that an increased housing cost of less than \$100 per month would lead them to move or significantly change their lifestyles (Reside Vancouver: An Anti-Displacement Plan, Thread Community Planning).

<sup>7</sup> Asthma Facts and Figures, Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/major-depression>. An estimated 21.0 million adults, or 8.4 percent of all U.S. adults, had at least one major depressive episode.



## APPROACH

With the ultimate, shared goal of improving the mental health status of Fourth Plain families, a coalition led by Evergreen Habitat for Humanity and Clark County Public Health is working to mitigate the negative impacts of unaffordable, substandard, and unstable housing. The coalition was joined by Vancouver City Government, Fourth Plain Forward (the area's place-based community development nonprofit), PeaceHealth Southwest Medical Center, Kaiser Permanente, and Legacy Health, as well as nearly 40 additional community partners. BUILD Fourth Plain addresses housing conditions through four intentional,

**ADVANCING HEALTH EQUITY:** Residents of Fourth Plain neighborhoods—many of whom are people of color—are much more susceptible to housing displacement than other Vancouver and Clark County residents, causing poorer health outcomes, including poorer mental health and well-being. The BUILD Fourth Plain coalition brings together government agencies, partner nonprofit organizations, and individual residents serving as advisors to address affordable housing. By working together to improve housing policies and systems, economic opportunities, and safe streets, BUILD Fourth Plain is building a community where everyone can thrive.

systemic interventions: 1. strengthening local data infrastructure; 2. local legislative advocacy; 3. policy assessment and implementation; and 4. training local leaders to promote sustainable, healthy neighborhood development.

This local BUILD initiative was born out of The Fourth Plain Coalition, first established in 2015 to increase access to physical activity on and around Fourth Plain Boulevard to address differences in health outcomes and economic security in these neighborhoods.<sup>9</sup> The Coalition expanded in 2018 to include over 30 organizations—local small businesses, schools, health systems, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies—whose work aligned with the Coalition's priorities of promoting safe streets, economic opportunity, and affordable housing. These priorities

had been identified by the City of Vancouver through both robust community engagement and study of the Fourth Plain area, which yielded the Fourth Plain Action Plan. The plan outlined the needs, assets, and potential community development solutions to improve the economic and health disparities experienced by residents in the target neighborhoods.

*Rent increases of even \$100 per month can be unaffordable for families in Fourth Plain. With a vacancy rate of less than 2 percent, there's nowhere to go if families can no longer afford their homes.—Heather Cochrun, Evergreen Habitat for Humanity*

<sup>9</sup> <https://fourthplainforward.org/fourth-plain-coalition/>



*We live in a weird time. People feel helpless and this has helped give a lot of people a voice when they didn't feel like they could do anything.—Kyle Roslund, Fourth Plain Forward*

After The Fourth Plain Coalition was established as a mechanism to enact the Action Plan, the Coalition continued to gather community feedback through surveys (via neighborhood community health workers), in-person events, youth outreach, focus groups, etc. Vancouver also worked with Urban and Regional Planning master's students to share best practices in anti-displacement housing policy. Public health and other community data was used to inform this work on expanding affordable housing and ameliorating housing policy, strengthening access to living wages through economic opportunities, and improving safety in the Fourth Plain community.

## COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

When Fourth Plain partners, led by Evergreen Habitat for Humanity and Clark County Public Health, became an awardee of The BUILD Health Challenge® (BUILD),



their work to address housing displacement and instability coalesced even more around residents' mental health and well-being. In order to center community advocacy in the collaborative's approach to housing and mental health, the Fourth Plain team launched a Community Advisory Committee (CAC).<sup>10</sup> Made up of local residents from different backgrounds and types of experience, the CAC's purpose is multi-pronged: to guide decisions about the work of the collaborative; to quickly assess needs and get community feedback about how to serve them; and to build community power through advocacy and leadership training. Committee members meet every other month, either in person or virtually, and their labor is compensated

through a stipend based on the extent of their participation.

The CAC's roots in the community helped BUILD Fourth Plain respond more quickly to needs that arose early in the COVID-19 pandemic. Though the necessarily virtual engagement was challenging for the CAC itself—as well as for its engagement with other community members—its assistance with getting emergency funds to local families and businesses meant people were helped faster and trust was generated between the community, the collaborative, and funders. As Heather Cochrun of lead partner Evergreen Habitat for Humanity noted, “When community resources were gathered, such as emergency funding from

<sup>10</sup> The Fourth Plain team's early connection to other BUILD awardees—particularly the New Brunswick, New Jersey, team—helped them develop and structure the Community Advisory Committee.



the Community Foundation, we were seen as a trusted entity with a genuine and authentic pulse on the community. We were poised to allocate funds where they were needed.”

*Health care systems are starting to understand the value of this community development work, even when it doesn't immediately impact their bottom line.—Lauren Henricksen, Clark County Public Health*

CAC members learn about housing policy and how to advocate at the local and state levels for actions like the eviction

moratorium with the help of Council for the Homeless, the coalition's housing advocacy partner. Leveraging learnings from this training, they have participated in webinars, additional training, and letter-writing campaigns. In 2020, BUILD Fourth Plain distributed nearly 10,000 educational outreach flyers to residents explaining the moratorium and their rights as tenants. CAC members were instrumental in sharing this information with the community. Comprehensive leadership training, meant to build resident power more holistically, is planned to begin in 2022.

Kyle Roslund, a CAC member and Washington Department of Transportation employee, joined the committee as a

result of volunteering through the Fourth Plain Coalition for neighborhood cleanups and other activities. Roslund explained, “Our work is to talk about issues like street safety and un-housed people, advise on how to work with the city and public health department on solutions and how Fourth Plain nonprofits can best do public outreach to residents. As we advocate for housing rights, BUILD Fourth Plain has helped build a more unified community around this work. So many people were out there trying stuff, in silos, and this has helped coalesce the efforts and communication.”

## HEALTH CARE & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Fourth Plain partners embraced the BUILD principles of working upstream and using integrated approaches in order to bridge the divide between Vancouver's local health care delivery systems and the people and organizations working closest to the issues of housing instability and mental health. When the PeaceHealth system provided additional funding to support BUILD Fourth Plain's connection with small, local BIPOC-led organizations, the team used the funding to directly compensate and offer capacity-building resources to them. Their goals were to ensure that local leaders' voices were better represented in the work and to improve BUILD's access to their communities.



BUILD Fourth Plain now seeks to establish longer-term contracts with culturally specific community organizations—in particular, those serving Chuukese,<sup>11</sup> Latinx, and Black communities—to develop mutually beneficial partnerships. Through these partnerships, the collaborative can support those organizations’ work while the local leaders help BUILD Fourth Plain better connect with, understand, and address the needs of local BIPOC communities.

*Receiving the BUILD funding propelled our housing work forward ... and the doors this funding opened to partnering more intentionally with health care was also an important milestone for us.*  
—Heather Cochrun, Evergreen Habitat for Humanity

Key partnerships have also supported BUILD Fourth Plain’s use of data to continuously develop responsive strategy. Health data and evaluation findings, as well as city and state housing data, are brought to the initiative by the Clark County Public Health Department. Schools also make student data available, which supports the understanding of strategies for addressing teen mental health. The outcomes are better data

collection tools and a shared database to enable BUILD Fourth Plain partners to track and respond to trends over time.

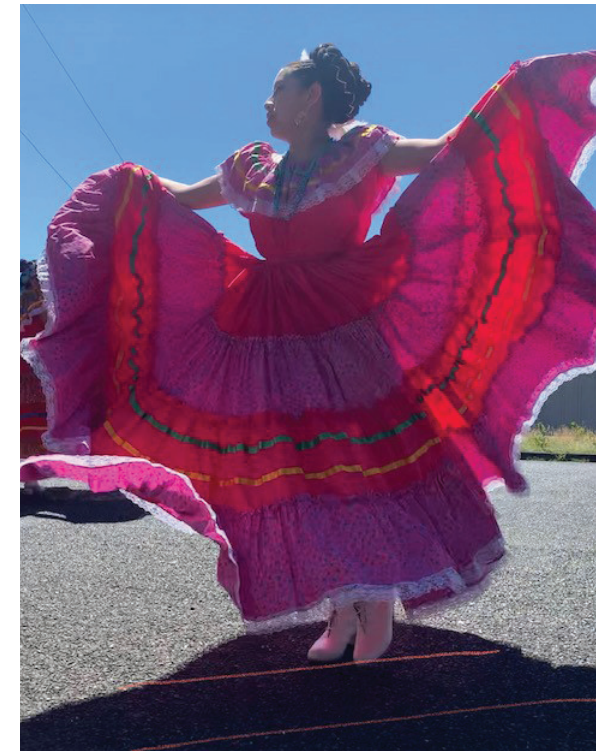
## POLICY - TENANT RIGHTS & ANTI-RACISM

BUILD Fourth Plain’s most significant policy efforts to date have centered around an eviction moratorium, in order to stabilize housing and improve the observable mental health challenges experienced by Vancouver residents. The initiative team and CAC worked with partners at Council for the Homeless and the Washington Low Income Housing Alliance to increase knowledge about the importance of the eviction moratorium and the effect of evictions on residents. The moratorium was first set to expire on August 1, 2020, then extended to December 31, 2020, and then extended again to March 2021.

Extending the moratorium well into 2021 meant that families did not have to worry about evictions over the holidays and the legislature could address the moratorium during their long session, when they could put policies and repayment plans in place so mass evictions would not occur once the moratorium expired. The BUILD Fourth Plain team focused on the impact of three important state bills that included just cause evictions, providing tenants with legal

representation when facing eviction, and limiting rent increases for one year after the eviction moratorium was set to expire. Ultimately, just cause evictions and the right to legal representation both passed, ensuring protections for tenants after the eviction moratorium expired.

More recently, BUILD Fourth Plain is refocusing on housing policy, working with the BUILD partners and CAC to begin a policy prioritization process. With the help of Council for the Homeless, with



<sup>11</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chuukese\\_people](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chuukese_people)



whom BUILD Fourth Plain plans to partner on its housing efforts, the collaborative is considering whether and how to engage with a set of state-level housing policy priorities recommended to the community through the RESIDE Vancouver report.<sup>12</sup> The policies are all focused on anti-displacement and vary from housing production and preservation to Individual Development Account programs and workforce development.

Complementing BUILD Fourth Plain efforts, CAC members have also engaged in direct advocacy efforts. For example, one member attended the housing lobby day in Olympia, where they met with local legislators to advocate for the above measures. In response to recent momentum in Fourth Plain around police brutality and Black Lives Matter, the CAC is planning to begin engaging in anti-racist work. The City of Vancouver has held

listening sessions for the City Council and Mayor to learn more about the experiences of communities of color when it comes to racial discrimination in Vancouver. CAC members attended those sessions to provide their insight and experiences of racism locally.

## IMPACT OF PANDEMIC & OTHER EMERGENCIES

Vancouver, along with much of the Pacific Northwest, experienced a double crisis when historic wildfires coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. BUILD Fourth Plain's community engagement and resident leadership efforts were hampered, as in-person interaction became unsafe and priorities for collaborative partners shifted to immediate, emergency needs. School closures and economic hardship inhibited families from participating in a more virtual environment. As Heather Cochrun shared, "There are a lot of people in our community who don't have internet access or computers. It's been difficult to engage and connect with these folks and ensure their needs are being met."

At the same time, the upstream issues Fourth Plain urgently wanted to address were deteriorating. Lauren Henricksen noted: "The pandemic made it unsafe to go to other people's homes or to public

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.cityofvancouver.us/cdd/page/reside-vancouver-anti-displacement-strategy>



spaces, and with the fires, it wasn't safe to go outside. We saw an increase in mental health challenges, impacts to physical activity and respiratory health issues for many people in our focus area." These impacts are directly related to housing, in that low-income residents in poor quality housing stock experienced these issues most acutely. "While challenging for our work in that it slowed the momentum of engagement and training for a period, the crises also helped put into perspective again the importance of safe, affordable housing," said Henricksen.

Keeping the CAC connected to each other and to the work has been a continuing challenge, but COVID-19 also created unexpected opportunities. For example, Fourth Plain Forward was able to offer testing and vaccination in culturally appropriate ways. Also, the CAC successfully helped to champion a statewide eviction moratorium while helping to get the word out about available resources to support affected neighborhood residents.

## THE FUTURE

While BUILD Fourth Plain does not yet have all of its funding in place, the collaborative is committed to ensuring it can continue to move forward—and potentially expand—given how vital it is to the community's

safety and well-being. BUILD Fourth Plain leads are currently seeking funding to propel efforts around economic opportunity and safe streets. The team also is already participating in a pilot to help Fourth Plain residents obtain new, higher-wage jobs, as well as efforts to address child care shortages in the area.

Sustaining the community power-building and leadership development among Fourth Plain residents through the Community Advisory Committee remains a priority. Committee members are trying to recruit more Black, Latinx, and Chuukese residents. Several members are stepping into leadership roles, so an interim goal is to transition the power structure out of Clark County Public Health and other organizational partners into CAC hands. BUILD Fourth Plain is working to formalize some aspects of the CAC—including nominating a chairperson and establishing a selection committee—in order to begin this transition process. Ultimately, the intention is for Fourth Plain Forward, the Business Improvement District organization, to become the BUILD Fourth Plain backbone in place of Clark County Public Health.

Kyle Roslund, who recently joined Fourth Plain Forward's board of directors, emphasized that he and other CAC members are working to get "more neighbors talking to each other and solving problems together



... we are listening to hear where the community has energy to try to change and improve conditions here and are starting to build new plans for action moving forward."



The Build Health Challenge® is contributing to the creation of a new norm in the U.S.—one that puts multi-sector, community-driven partnerships at the center of health in order to reduce health disparities caused by systemic or social inequity.

BUILD is a national program designed to support partnerships between community-based organizations, health departments, hospitals/health systems, health plans, and residents that are working to address important health issues in their community. Each community collaborative addresses root causes of chronic disease (also commonly referred to as the social determinants of health) in their local area by moving resources, attention, and action upstream. To date, BUILD has supported 55 projects across the U.S. over the course of three award cycles.

To learn more about BUILD, visit [buildhealthchallenge.org](https://buildhealthchallenge.org).

BUILD's third cohort (2019–2022) was made possible with generous support from:

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- Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation
- Blue Shield of California Foundation
- Communities Foundation of Texas
- The de Beaumont Foundation
- The Episcopal Health Foundation
- The Kresge Foundation
- Methodist Healthcare Ministries of South Texas, Inc.
- New Jersey Health Initiatives
- The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- The W.K. Kellogg Foundation

