

John Clymer: The connections between mental and physical health and particularly metabolic health have been hidden in the shadows for too long. Thank you, Ileana Pinna and Chris Jones for illuminating those links and raising our awareness of the investments that must be made to improve mental health and actions that can be taken today. I'm joined now by someone with a different type of expertise. Martha Guerrero is the mayor of West Sacramento, California.

I could spend the next five minutes reading her bio sketch which gives testament to her life of public service, but I'll call attention to just a few items that are particularly relevant to health equity and mental health. Mayor Guerrero serves as a board member of the Sacramento Area Council of Government's Race, Equity, and Inclusion Work Group, the Public Financing Authority, Enhanced Infrastructure Financing Corporation, and the Regional Bike Share Policy Steering Committee. She began her career in 1998 with the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health where she helped secure passage of California's mental health parity law.

She's a licensed clinical social worker and has served on the Yolo County local mental health board. Since being elected mayor in 2020, Mayor Guerrero has used Moved with the Mayor to raise vaccine confidence and engage West Sacramento community members in active heart-healthy living. Mayor Guerrero, thank you for joining us.

Martha Guerrero: Thank you so much for having me here, John. It's an honor.

John Clymer: We just heard top-level medical and public health experts discussing the very powerful effects that mental health conditions have on heart failure, heart attacks, stroke, obesity, addiction, and more. There are compelling medical reasons to lean into mental health screening treatment and the prevention of stress, anxiety, and depression. You, as mayor, invest a lot of your time and attention on mental health. What prompted you to make mental health a community priority?

Martha Guerrero: Well, John, as a licensed clinical social worker I have made a strong connection to the benefit of providing the community and employees of the city of West Sacramento access to outdoor activities that give them an opportunity to exercise and reduce their levels of anxiety and stress because exercise and movement, physical movement, does help reduce it. I'm a runner myself and I know personally and have worked with my physician. We directly

see the correlation of reducing the blood pressure, and cholesterol levels in my system.

It was a time with COVID when the gyms were closed and we could directly see the connection because I couldn't go to the gym. Knowing that, in West Sacramento, we are doing a lot more to create more bike and pedestrian pathways. So that's been a priority for me to make sure that the entire community is thriving and doing more outdoor recreational activities.

John Clymer: Thriving is a great word and a great goal. So can mayors and other community-level organizations help to prevent anxiety, depression, and cardiometabolic disease by helping people be as physically active as you are and by increasing social support?

Martha Guerrero: Yes. I think mayors can have a significant role in creating opportunities through their parks and rec departments. There are activities that we worked with also in partnership with our school district because they have recreational facilities that we tapped and we are in partnership allowing for our constituents to be able to, and employees who work here, to be able to use the facilities so that they can have their children participate in movie night and being able to express what their feelings are and also allowing the parents to engage in just more opportunities to spend time together with the family.

So we have outdoor movie night activities. We also have rock climbing activities. We have opportunities for the community to be able to engage in cycle cross. It's another event we've had here. Ride your bike, which is in May, awareness month. I blended that with suicide prevention as well. So I partnered with Heritage Oaks, which is a clinic, community clinic that is in our community to raise awareness so that not only do they know that it's important to get physical activity, but there are programs nearby that they can access if they have a need.

John Clymer: And you just mentioned, Your Honor, you connected to suicide prevention. Can you expand on that a little bit? What is the connection?

Martha Guerrero: The connection is that we've noticed in our region an increase of youth and individuals who are finding themselves with suicidal ideation. Post-COVID it's been very hard for people to transition back, back into the workplace, back into employment opportunities that they find enjoyable in their lifetime, and worthwhile. So that stressor is bringing an awareness to all of us to see that there is an

impact on the mental well-being of individuals. So we do need to provide those linkages.

Once we have these recreational activities and events, we need to provide immediately directly to them the resources that they can access. That's something that I think is incredibly important as mayor and our entire community. So that we work in partnership with Yolo County as well to provide information throughout the city, elevating their awareness, and access to mental health services, but also outdoor recreational activities is key so that they can do much better in their life.

John Clymer:

Thanks. So, Mayor Guerrero, you're very active in the US Conference of Mayors. So I know you're very aware that the US Conference has called on Congress to invest more resources into expanding the public health workforce. We hear stories from communities throughout the country. We see data that tell us that there's a huge mismatch between the need for mental health professionals and the number of mental health professionals available today.

We need to close that gap, but I think we all recognize that that's gonna take not only a big investment but time, years of time to accomplish that. We can't flip a switch. So I'm wondering, do you see actions that you as a mayor can take such as some of what you just described, I think to help people take immediate action right now before – rather than saying, "Well, it's gonna be a long time before we're able to provide treatment to everyone who needs it"?

Martha Guerrero:

Yes. I think what Sacramento has done is partnered with Yolo County to provide crisis intervention teams. I know that may be a challenge because you do need access to mental health professionals who have the training and expertise. What you could do is provide training to our first responders who sometimes meet those individuals at their time when they are in a crisis. To provide training at least. Mental health first aid is a training that can be provided to not only first responders but also to school personnel. So that's a way for at least to identify those who are in crisis and to also do it in a way that is fun and relaxing.

With children, you can do it when they're doing their physical education to help individuals make that connection that doing physical activity, letting them recognize to realize that they're feeling more relaxed and then helping them to make those positive connections so that they can see if they're feeling stressed or anxious, they're having a hard time breathing, that they can utilize

the techniques that they are learning from school. Or when we are doing an outdoor recreational activity here in Sacramento with Move with the Mayor such as _____ Yolo we did a walk-a-thon. We talked about important activities and how they can reduce your stress and anxiety. You'll see the difference long term with your health.

John Clymer: Yeah. That's great that you're marshaling those resources. I'm really excited to announce not only to you, Mayor Guerrero, but everyone participating in this meeting today that the National Forum in collaboration with the American Public Health Association has just received funding from CDC to add mental health to the Move with the Mayor platform. So beginning later this year you and your fellow mayors can use Move with the Mayor messaging and policy and program support to educate and engage your community in evidence-based interventions to prevent and reduce anxiety, stress, and depression, and simultaneously improve cardiometabolic health.

Martha Guerrero: That's wonderful news. Thank you so much, John, and thank you for all your work to establish Move with the Mayor because that has been a huge help in my partnership with the community when we established May as bike awareness month and also with Heritage Oaks, they were unaware. Now they know they can partner with other jurisdictions where they offer their services to enhance a partnership with their mayors through Move with the Mayor.

John Clymer: Well, it's a two-way street, Your Honor. We really are deeply gratified to work with you and mayors of other communities because as much as we love working with state and local public health agencies and with other agencies, community-based organizations, you mentioned in West Sacramento the parks and rec department. What we've seen over the last few years through the Move with the Mayor experience is that when the mayor takes the lead it electrifies the program. It's like turning on a turbo charger. More people come out. More media pay attention. The message spreads farther. So we're grateful for the leadership that you and your colleagues bring to population health.

Martha Guerrero: Thank you. And I'm grateful for Move with the Mayor partnership because it has helped me allow opportunities, more opportunities to be able to connect with my community. So thank you so much, John, and Move with the Mayor team. It's a significant support that I've received to not only do physical fitness activities, but to

increase awareness on the vaccines for flu, COVID, and other important vaccines for our elderly and our young children.

John Clymer: Well, we are really grateful that you take advantage of it.

Martha Guerrero: Thank you.

John Clymer: Let's turn now to the theme of the overall meeting, not just this session, and that theme is health equity benefits everyone. I'm wondering, Your Honor, how do you engage people of varied socioeconomic groups in active healthy living?

Martha Guerrero: So what we've done was partner with Yolo County in providing a mobile farmer's truck, which allows for individuals to access fresh fruits and vegetables and they can use their Cal Fresh benefits, which are the benefits that they subsidize to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables here in the United States. So Cal Fresh allows them to be able to purchase the fruit, and learn how to make the food, but also promotes recreational activities by informing them of what is available to them in our parks and recreation facilities throughout the city.

So that's something that I think we do not only through social media but increasing their awareness of the connection between healthy eating and healthy living through more recreational activity. So that's one area. We also have a welcome baby program where we partnered with the county where a nurse visits those. There's about an 80 percent uptake among those who are Latino Spanish-speaking populations who are educating themselves on once their child is born that it's important to get access to healthcare.

They have somebody who visits them at the home and then just teaching them ways so that they can maintain their own mental health and physical health. So trying to make those linkages and partnerships is incredibly important in us for – to promote ways to reduce unhealthy habits and promote more healthy habits throughout our entire city.

John Clymer: That's terrific. We have time I think for one last question and I wanna focus it on language and communications because we all know words matter. So I'm wondering, how do you discuss with non-minorities and middle class and affluent people the kinds of policies, programs, and infrastructure changes that would improve health equity? How do you make the message resonate with people who think that health equity is about other people?

Martha Guerrero: I think having trusted messengers is very important. That is being able to look within those in the community who are the most effective trusted messengers and partnering with them so that they can reach out to those that they can connect with the quickest. So that is one of the areas that I worked on in part of our community that has not had access to recreational activities over the years. It's been pretty effective that they are learning how to engage more by giving us feedback on what's important to them in their area, and what kind of recreational activities are more meaningful to them.

So we're learning a lot more as a result of that, getting to the trusted messengers to reach out seeking their input and then making it more applicable to what is their priority, not something the city imposes on them to get their feedback and then to make that connection. So we are doing that in our Sacramento Complete Streets program. We had an event yesterday where we reached out to the community and got feedback on how to improve an unsafe street to a much safer street. So we're very grateful that we have the opportunity to do that today.

John Clymer: Well, that's a great note on which to bring this to a close. I am really excited to hear you refer there to Complete Streets. That of course is an evidence-based intervention. We know it's proven to be effective in empowering people and improving health. So very excited that you're advancing that policy in West Sacramento.

Martha Guerrero: Thank you, John.

John Clymer: Mayor Guerrero, we really appreciate all of your work and the time that you spend with all of us, the National Forum members so that we can learn from you and what you're doing in West Sacramento. So thank you for your leadership and thank you for spending this time with us today.

Martha Guerrero: Thank you, John. Appreciate the opportunity to share what we're doing here in West Sacramento and look forward to continuing our partnership.

John Clymer: Great. Thank you.

Martha Guerrero: Thank you.

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