

MORE THAN A NATIONAL ORGANIZATION

Q & A with American Heart Association's New Executive Director

ERIN LINK



HOW THE AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION IS FOCUSED ON MAKING AN IMPACT IN CHARLOTTE

Q: How have you seen the AHA change over the last few years?

A: Although I'm new to Charlotte, I've been with the AHA for over a decade. The AHA is one of the most recognized non-profits in the nation and has invested over \$4 billion in heart and stroke research, second only to the federal government. Many of the lifesaving technological advancements and guidelines used in local hospitals were funded by generous gifts from past donors at Heart Ball, Heart Walk and our Go Red for Women movement. While we continue to support innovative science and ensure quality care, we also recognize that community environments play a crucial role in health outcomes. There has been a shift in focus for the AHA, particularly at the local level, to address health disparities rooted in social determinants, access to care, healthier environments, and many of the factors leading to chronic disease that negatively impact our communities.



Q: What do you see as the biggest challenge for building a culture of health in Charlotte and improving health outcomes for our region?

A: Charlotte ranked at the bottom for upward economic mobility in a recent analysis of the America's 50 largest cities. Poverty often results in poor health outcomes for our residents, and unfortunately, where you live influences your life expectancy. We are committed to ensuring everyone has equal opportunity to make choices that lead to better health; that they have access to the services they need; that we help eliminate barriers; strengthen our cardiac safety net; and improve environments where we live, work, play and pray. This focus has birthed local initiatives such as Promotores de Salud in the Latino Community, Kids Cook with Heart in CMS middle schools and self-monitoring blood pressure kiosks at Goodwill Opportunity Campus and Camino Community Center.

Q: How can others help with the important work being done in the community by the AHA and its local partners?

A: Our mission is to be a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives, but we can't do that alone. We are inviting local families and organizations to come alongside us as we provide



prevention education, blood pressure management, hands-only CPR trainings, youth health initiatives, healthy food access, workplace wellness, tobacco cessation, mental health and so many other areas—all through a health equity lens. With your help, we can identify the needs of this community and the challenges we face. Then, work together to find solutions. If you are interested in joining us as a sponsor, donor or volunteer, please reach out to me at Erin.Link@heart.org or call 704.417.5767.



Erin Link is a native of Northeast TN, and a graduate of Lipscomb University. Before being hired as the executive director of the Charlotte office, she served in numerous development roles for the American Heart Association, including vice president

of development in Nashville, TN. She and her husband, Josh recently relocated to Charlotte with their two daughters, Adelyn and Landry.