

The Healthy Places Coalition

The Healthy Places Coalition advances public health involvement in land use and transportation planning to ensure that all neighborhoods in California promote the opportunity to live a healthy life. We accomplish this by:

- Supporting collaboration to strengthen activism and engagement;
- Developing and advancing local and state policy;
- Holding government agencies accountable;
- Engaging with developers for responsible planning and promoting healthy communities,
- Increasing public and policymaker awareness; and
- Promoting research and tools.

The Coalition consists of practitioners from the planning, public health, parks and recreation, and other related fields, community advocates, academics, and concerned individuals from around the state committed to social and health equity.

Background

There is growing recognition of the ways in which local conditions and neighborhood design impact community and personal wellbeing. Researchers, public officials, and community advocates are identifying the ways in which land use, transportation and community design (the built environment) influence broader health and quality of life factors, including physical activity, nutrition, substance abuse, injuries, mental health, violence, and environmental quality. The allocation of land for different uses, the layout and design, the physical structures, and the overall appearance and ambience of a community – including housing, goods and services, transportation systems, and recreational resources – directly shape patterns of living and working that, in turn, influence behavior and overall health.

Land use planning that accounts for impacts on health has the potential to support multiple objectives. For example, research provides substantial evidence that:

- Appropriately located, safe, and affordable housing and more integrated neighborhoods reduce asthma and lead poisoning, lessen hunger, ease stress, violence, and limit homelessness.
- Creating higher density, mixed-use developments closer to transit and job centers enhances public safety, increases access to grocery stores, schools and child care centers, encourages walking and bicycling, decreases air pollution, reduces diet-related diseases and limits transportation-related injuries.
- Access to natural spaces, public transit and pedestrian-friendly environments promote physical activity and improve mental health.

Offering Solutions

General Plans, Master or Specific Plans, zoning codes, development projects and land-use policies can all be strengthened by an analysis based on recent research on the determinants of health. Processes and tools, including Health Impact Assessments, exist for such analysis and can be used by public health professionals, planners, and community members working to improve their neighborhoods. The Healthy Places Coalition reviews and publicizes effective tools and examples of successful community efforts.

For these tools to be used routinely, and for health to be considered as part of land use and transportation decision making, government at all levels must facilitate the involvement of a variety of practitioners and community advocates. The Healthy Places Coalition is developing and advocating for state and local policies that advance these goals.

Many undesirable health outcomes can be avoided with mitigations that exist today. The Healthy Places Coalition is focused on providing such solutions and, through those, creating a more equitable society.

To get involved or for more information about the Healthy Places Coalition, please contact Jeremy Cantor at jeremy@preventioninstitute.org or at (510) 444-8027 x333.