

Plan4Health: Cross-Sector Collaboration in Linn County, Iowa

"Through this project, we have had the opportunity to go beyond a culture of reacting to poor health, and instead move towards cultivating a community environment that inherently promotes the physical and mental well being and safety of all residents. This can only be accomplished through cross-collaborative partnership that brings planning, public health, and social services together to achieve a common goal."

*Amy Lepowsky, PhD, MPH, CHES
Epidemiologist- Linn County Public Health*

In the fall of 2015, the coalition convened a joint board meeting between the Iowa Public Health Association and the American Planning Association Iowa Chapter. Through discussions during the meeting, the boards were able to see the extent of connection between IPHA and APA's Iowa Chapter.

Success Stories



SUMMARY

Plan4Health connects communities across the country, funding work at the intersection of planning and public health. Anchored by the American Planning Association (APA) and the American Public Health Association (APHA), Plan4Health supports creative partnerships to build sustainable, cross-sector coalitions. Planning Healthy Iowa Communities (Linn County, IA) addresses inactivity and unhealthy diets. The project was guided by two objectives, encouraging physical activity to combat sedentary lifestyles and incorporating food with high nutritional content at food pantries.

CHALLENGE

The percentage of Linn County residents who are either obese or overweight has risen dramatically over the years. According to Linn County Public Health, in 2013, 40 percent of Linn County 5th graders were obese or overweight. In 2014, 68.6 percent of Linn County residents reported being overweight or obese, a 12% increase from 2010. In 2009, only 20 percent of adults in Linn County reported consuming at least five or more fruits and vegetables a day – and 2014 reports from Feeding America indicated

that 16 percent of children and 12 percent of adults were food insecure. The state of Iowa reports that more than 27,000 Linn County residents receive nutrition assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which supports eligible, low-income individuals and families. Planning Healthy Iowa Communities is working to address both physical activity and nutrition through its array of initiatives rooted in the collaboration between planners and public health professionals.

SOLUTION

Planning Healthy Iowa Communities focused on developing a food pantry training manual and supporting biophilic and active living design efforts to integrate planning and public health in the community. The cross-sector collaboration within the food environment context enabled the coalition to develop a deeper understanding of community needs, assets, and the barriers in place that limit food access for Linn County's vulnerable populations. In addition, the coalition was able to leverage the knowledge and expertise of the collaborative to influence changes to the built environment that support access to healthy food, opportunities for physical activity and reconnection with the natural world. Changes within the built environment are made possible through the adoption of plans, procedures and regulations at the systems level that put health in the forefront.

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SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS

The work in Linn County is an example for other communities of how to change environments to make healthy living easier where people live, learn, work, and play. Through the statewide alignment, Iowa will be able to advance the work that was conducted in Linn County to other counties throughout the state.

Share your ideas and questions with Planning Healthy Iowa Communities, or reach out to your local planning or public health department. For more information about Linn County and all of the coalitions participating in Plan4Health check out www.plan4health.us and join the conversation on social media with #plan4health.

RESULTS

The statewide effort and partnership building have been key features of the coalition's work. The coalition has been very strategic about connecting Plan4Health to existing efforts and supporting the true integration between planning and public health. Two major efforts were the development of Active Design Standards, focused on the City of Marion, and a food pantry manager training.

The coalition is piloting the new design standards in three sites in Marion, including a local school district. The school will be redesigned as a biophilic campus, with Safe Routes to School components incorporating active transportation elements. Students are actively involved in the work, providing feedback and sharing ideas with coalition leaders.

Plan4Health is made possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The views expressed in this success story do not necessarily reflect the official policies of the CDC or imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. Learn more about Plan4Health and the National Implementation and Dissemination of Chronic Disease Prevention project at www.cdc.gov/communityhealth.

Success Stories

<http://nccd.cdc.gov/nccdsuccessstories/>