

Plan4Health: The Dane County Capital Region Healthy Communities Initiative

Dane County, WI

SUMMARY

Plan4Health connects communities across the country, funding work at the intersection of planning and public health. Anchored by American Planning Association (APA) Chapters and American Public Health Association (APHA) Affiliates, Plan4Health supports creative partnerships to build sustainable, cross-sector coalitions. The Dane County Capital Region Healthy Communities (CRHC) initiative aims to increase physical activity and access to nutritious food. Initiatives include working with local and state officials to incorporate health into planning; eliminating food deserts; and helping neighborhoods to become more walking and biking friendly.



CHALLENGE

In 2014, the rate of physical inactivity in Dane County was 18 percent and the adult obesity rate was 22 percent; six percent of the population had diabetes. Additionally, recent research presented a stark contrast between Black and White populations: 75 percent of Black children lived in poverty in 2011 compared to 5 percent of White children. Analysis from the University of Wisconsin showed that block groups that were more walkable and closer to public

transportation also had lower rates of chronic disease. The CRHC initiative responded to the analysis—and to health disparities—by proposing the development of a comprehensive data index. Through an increased understanding of physical activity opportunities and healthy food options, the data index will empower target communities in Dane County to change their environments as well as provide a roadmap for the index to be replicated across the state.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

Dane County residents are encouraged to reach out to the coalition to learn more about upcoming activities and events—or to stop by the South Madison Farmers Market. If you are an APA or APHA member, please look for CRHC's work to be featured in upcoming local and national conferences! To learn more about the CRHC's project and all coalitions participating in Plan4Health, check out the project website (www.plan4health.us) and join the national conversation at the intersection of planning and public health on social media by using and following #plan4health.

"Most of our students take a 30 minute bus ride for what should be less than a 10 minute walk. A successful active 'To School and Back' program integrates health and fitness with environmental awareness and safety. It is an opportunity to work closely with the community to create a healthy lifestyle for children."

-Dane County Resident

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SOLUTION

The CRHC initiative includes representatives from a range of perspectives in Dane County: the Regional Planning Commission, the City of Madison, the regional transportation planning agency, the University of Wisconsin, the Healthy Kids Collaborative, the local farmers market and food cooperative. Bringing together key institutions as well as hiring residents from the target communities has ensured a comprehensive and balanced approach to the work. Developing the Active Living Index, a data tool to educate decision-makers and empower planning and public health professionals, is complemented by the direct engagement of community-based partners in urban, suburban and rural target communities, including area food deserts.

RESULTS

The Active Living Index, a comprehensive data tool that will focus on understanding local experiences in select Dane County communities, will also provide decision-makers with the economic impact of changes to the built environment. Capturing the return on investment (ROI) is key to ensuring the most effective improvements are prioritized—and that the power of population-level impact is understood. It's not about getting one resident to join the local jogging club. It's about making streets walkable, so every resident has the opportunity to walk to the grocery store or bike to school. The index itself represents the combination of planning and public health perspectives: chronic disease rates, demographic data, and the environment itself. By considering rural, urban, and suburban sites, the coalition team is developing a continuum of pilot experiences. Towns, cities, and villages from across Wisconsin will be able to recognize elements of their own communities in the test sites—the first step in any replication effort!

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

Outreach to APA and APHA members is a key aspect of CRHC's initiative. Sharing lessons learned from the development of the Active Living Index and from the engagement of community members will strengthen future efforts in Dane County as well as future projects throughout the APA and APHA professional community. As the Plan4Health work progresses and the index is made publically available, the coalition will launch a communications campaign. Combining messages about the importance of policy, systems, and environment change with workshops and training sessions, CRHC not only raise awareness about possible interventions, but will also strengthen the professional capacity for work at the intersection of planning and public health.

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