

Plan4Health: Planning Healthy Iowa Communities Linn County, IA

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. Planning Healthy Iowa Communities (Linn County, IA) addresses inactivity and unhealthy diets, especially among low-income Linn County residents. Two objectives include 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 2010, 56 percent of Linn County residents reported being overweight or obese. 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 assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). 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.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

Planning Healthy Iowa Communities wants to hear from you! Share your ideas and questions with APA and APHA. Non-residents can reach out to their local planning or public health department.

To learn more about this project and all coalitions participating in Plan4Health, check out www.plan4health.us and join the national conversation at the intersection of planning and public health on social media by using and following [#plan4health](https://twitter.com/plan4health).

"While much planning and design is being done in a manner that provides some healthy choices it seems almost an accidental alignment; however it reinforces the need to bring health professionals to the planning and design table early to strategically address the health needs of a community and not just default to building a trail and calling that a "healthy" project."

- John Peterson

Contact

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SOLUTION

Planning for Healthy Iowa Communities has brought together key stakeholders from the community. The energy and strength of the cross-sector collaboration has led the coalition to select a comprehensive list of interventions. Developing active living design recommendations, active transportation design standards, and biophilic design standards will result in an array of policies to increase opportunities for physical activity. Recognizing that Linn County's most vulnerable residents rely on food pantries, the coalition has focused its nutrition efforts on identifying gaps in the food pantry system and encouraging institutional changes to increase access to food with higher nutritional content through the development of a manual and training program for food pantry directors.

RESULTS

The initial project period for this emerging coalition has been focused on cultivating new partnerships, taking time to understand established systems, and vetting potential design strategies. Bringing together a range of stakeholders around any new initiative is challenging. Bringing together stakeholders from different sectors to tackle two chronic disease risk factors requires the translation of jargon and the setting of a common agenda. While the strategies will yield policy change for the county and ignite conversations around biophilic design in the Midwest, the coalition building experience itself will bring lessons learned to APA and APHA professionals across the country.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

Planning Healthy Iowa Communities will continue to develop and promote active living design standards, engaging residents in the process and ensuring the proposed changes meet the objectives of both planners and public health professionals. The coalition will also continue to engage APA and APHA members through local and national conference presentations and member networks, sharing lessons learned and insights into the challenges and opportunities of cross-sector coalition work.

Plan4Health is made possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The views expressed in this newsletter 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 for Chronic Disease Prevention project at www.cdc.gov/communityhealth.