

# Plan4Health: Active Living and Healthy Eating in Summit County, OH

"In recent years, we have seen a promising increase in the number of community gardens popping up within the City of Akron throughout Summit County. This has fostered both a growing sense of community amongst supporters of urban agriculture and, more broadly, a culture of support for community gardening from both traditional and nontraditional partners."

*Lisa Nunn  
Director  
Let's Grow Akron*

*Let's Grow Akron, a key implementation partner, has successfully engaged residents and local officials—with more than 100 attendees at the Let's Get Growing workshop in February 2016.*



## 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. Plan4Health Summit County (Ohio) believes higher levels of community health are possible through urban design. The coalition incorporated Complete Streets policies into existing transportation plans, expanded use of garden space in the community to emphasize making farm fresh produce available, and introduced client choice pantries to the existing pantry system.

## CHALLENGE

The burden of chronic disease in Summit County is significant, with disease prevalence rising well above the national average. In 2011, Summit County was ranked 48 and 36 out of 88 counties for morbidity and mortality, respectively. Summit County has an estimated poverty rate of nearly 16 percent, and is 29 percent for children between the ages of five and 17. Additionally, one third of Summit County's low-income population lives in

a food desert area. The target communities of the Buchtel neighborhood in West Akron, Barberton, Springfield/Lakemore, and Twinsburg Township all have high prevalence of at least one chronic disease risk factor. From an obesity rate of nearly 30 percent in Barberton to more than 60 percent of Springfield/Lakemore residents with high cholesterol, these communities need options to make healthier choices the easier choices.

## SOLUTION

The Summit County Plan4Health coalition is engaging in multiple nutrition strategies: launching client choice food pantries in three sites, partnering with five corner stores to implement a farm to community model, and leveraging food assistance programs through mini farmers market. The coalition also strengthened and expanded community gardens and developed mentoring components of the Master Gardener program.

The coalition supported increased access to physical activity opportunities. In addition to a Safe Routes to School initiative, the coalition led Complete Streets conversations in the target communities and engaged a variety of stakeholders, including hospitals, students, and the regional planning and policy departments, throughout the process.

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## SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS

The work in Summit County, OH is an example for other communities of how to change environments to make healthy living easier where people live, learn, work, and play.

Plan4Health Summit County encourages residents to reach out and get involved in the coalition. For non-residents, consider checking out a local farmers market or walking or biking to school. For more information about Summit County and all of the coalitions participating in Plan4Health, check out the Plan4Health project website ([www.plan4health.us](http://www.plan4health.us)) and join the conversation on social media with #plan4health.

## RESULTS

The Plan4Health leadership team highlighted the link between Complete Streets and work throughout Ohio in a November 2015 workshop. Presented in partnership with the Akron section of the APA and hosted at the Summit County Health Department, the workshop was a huge success, with more than 50 attendees and a range of planners and engineers from across the county in attendance. The workshop resulted in a resolution for a task force for the new mayor and city council to develop a Complete Streets ordinance for the City of Akron. The workshop materials were also presented again—this time to 75 community members who were passionate about making their streets safe and accessible for all.

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](http://www.cdc.gov/communityhealth).