

# Plan4Health: Measuring Active Living in Dane County, Wisconsin

"The only adults I see riding a bike through the neighborhood are people who don't live here. I can tell by their skin color and the type of bike they are riding."

Steve Meiers  
City of Madison Engineering

*During the first half of 2016, the Dane County coalition presented the Active Living Index to national audiences at the Active Living Research Conference, the American Planning Association National Conference, and the ESRI International User Conference.*



## 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. The Dane County Capital Region Healthy Communities (CRHC) initiative aims to increase opportunities for physical activity and access to nutritious food. Initiatives include working with local and state officials to incorporate health into planning, eliminate food deserts, and help neighborhoods

## 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. 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 diseases. The CRHC initiative responded to these health and physical activity disparities by developing a comprehensive, locally specific index (Active Living Index –

ALI) to evaluate the extent to which a place is conducive to active living. Through an increased understanding of physical activity opportunities and healthy food access, the ALI empowers target communities in Dane County to identify and pursue changes to their environments. With this data-driven approach, Dane County has provided a roadmap for a similar index to be replicated at the local level across the state.

## SOLUTION

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The CRHC initiative includes representatives from a range of fields and expertise 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. The CRHC represents these organizations as well as residents from the target communities – such broad stakeholder involvement has ensured a comprehensive and balanced approach to the coalition’s work from the beginning. The Active Living Index was created through this multi-stakeholder collaboration, and has thus successful as a web-based interactive data tool that serves to educate and empower decision makers, planning and public health professionals, and residents.

## RESULTS

The Active Living Index is a comprehensive data tool that allows for deep understanding of local conditions in Dane County. The index represents a combination of planning and public health expertise by incorporating demographic and built environment data that were found to be correlated to certain chronic diseases. ALI is widely applicable across the county as it was designed with rural, urban, and suburban considerations. The CRHC initiative team piloted the Active Living Index in three diverse communities with different levels of population density (urban, suburban, rural).

The Active Living Index was released in March 2016 and will continue to expand the substantial impact made by the beta version. The dataset constituting the ALI index is a key component of the Urban Footprint, an additional tool for scenario planning designed for project. The Urban Footprint will forecast for decision makers the economic, health, and emissions impacts of changes to the built environment.

The coalition is leading a communications campaign combining messages about the importance of policy, systems, and environment change with workshops and training sessions. This effort raises awareness about possible interventions, and also strengthens the professional capacity for work at the intersection of planning and public health, by consolidating the institutional collaboration necessary for changing the ‘silos’ approach.

## SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS

The efforts of CRHC are championing the importance of policy, systems, and environmental changes by illustrating the power of population-level impact. The work in Dane County, WI is an example for other communities and local institutions of how to change environments to make healthy eating and active living easier where people live, learn, work, and play.

If you live in Dane County, reach out the coalition to learn more about upcoming activities and events. For more information about Dane County, WI and all of the coalitions participating in Plan4Health, check out [www.plan4health.us](http://www.plan4health.us) and join the conversation on social media with #plan4health.

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).

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