

# Plan4Health: Community Engagement for a Healthy, Active Austin

"The quality of community-based programming coming out of the Smart Trips: North Austin program is phenomenal. We are reaching individuals and families like never before with completely unique transit, walking and bicycling programs that are customized for the priority community we're serving. This level of quality would not be possible without the partnerships we've formed with other organizations over the course of this pilot program."

*Laura Dierenfield  
Active Transportation Program Manager  
Austin Transportation Department*

*In February, fifteen children, including many refugees from Africa and the Middle East, learned how to fix their bicycles at the Bike Fix-a-Thon, one of over a dozen unique transit, bicycle and walking programs offered through the Austin Transportation Department's Smart Trips program.*

## 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. The Plan4Health Pilot Program, launched by the City of Austin, seeks to increase physical activity and improve the local sustainable food system. Through collaborative efforts, the initiative is implementing a community-wide program to increase the use of active transportation (walking, bicycling and transit) through a transportation options program called Smart Trips and to improve access to nutritious food through neighborhood food systems planning in the North Austin area.

## CHALLENGE

The Plan4Health Pilot Program serves more than 21,000 residents in North Central Austin, 68 percent of which identify as Hispanic or Latino. The 2012 Austin/Travis County Community Health Assessment recognized the lack of access to healthy foods and safe environments for physical activity as key concerns. The physical inactivity rate for the Hispanic population in Austin/Travis County is 32 percent, Hispanic adults and children report eating less fresh fruit and vegetable

servings than any other population group, and the prevalence of obesity among Hispanic children in Austin Independent School District is 25 percent. Additionally, 87 percent of trips in this area are made by personal automobile. The combination of inactivity and inadequate access to healthy food leave North Austin residents at risk to be burdened with chronic stress and increased instances of chronic disease.

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## SOLUTION

Under Plan4Health, the coalition focused on adapting transportation options programs flourishing in cities like Portland, Chicago, San Francisco and St. Paul to North Austin. The coalition also modeled other district-level food planning efforts such as the one in Vancouver to develop a food system toolkit to guide the community in creating a healthy, sustainable food system. These best practices were then adapted to fit the unique North Austin community by partnering with community-based organizations. The coalition, through a comprehensive outreach strategy, engaged over 100 local organizations to develop champions to help in the implementation of these programs and initiate policy change.

## SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS

The work of the Plan4Health initiative aligns with the City of Austin's comprehensive plan, Imagine Austin, ensuring that the Smart Trips program and food system toolkit are integrated into future plans for the community. The Smart Trips program is now a core service of the Austin Transportation Department and expanded to other parts of Austin in the spring of 2016. In addition, physical changes to the streets through improvements to bike lanes, transit service and sidewalks have helped more residents of North Austin use active modes to travel to destinations. These institutional and physical changes are an example for other communities of how to change environments to make healthy living easier where people live, learn, work, and play.

Show your support for the project by making a plan to take transit, walk or bike for your next trip and choose the healthy option for your next meal. For more information about 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.

## RESULTS

The coalition developed the Smart Trips: North Austin pilot program to encourage physical activity through active transportation. Residents were invited to order their own customized transportation toolkit full of transportation resources that assist people in navigating their communities by walking, bicycling, transit and shared car. The toolkits could be ordered through the mail, online, at many community events and through specially arranged visits to low-income housing properties. In addition, over a dozen unique community-based programs ranging from transit instruction to family bicycle safety to mom-toddler walks were offered over a six month period.

The food systems efforts began with maps showing assets of the community's food system, followed by interviews and focus groups with community members in collaboration with students from the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs. The coalition subsequently developed a North Austin neighborhood food plan that includes a toolkit supporting community gardens, healthy food access, and food waste recovery.

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).

## Success Stories

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