

# Plan4Health: Nutri-Bike-Ajo Coalition Ajo, AZ

*Martha Monroy*

## 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 Nutri-Bike-Ajo Coalition's goal is to create a sustainable cycling hub that educates, trains, provides resources, and builds health-based partnerships with the Ajo community. The asset-based coalition includes community residents, Desert Senita Community Health Center, International Sonoran Desert Institute, Ajo Chamber of Commerce, Pima County Parks & Recreation and Pima County Department of Transportation.

## Challenge

Ajo, AZ is a small rural community with a total population of 3,165. There is a great need for increased access to safe opportunities for physical activity as well as innovative economic drivers. Recent studies found that 71.4 percent of families were living below the federal 200 percent poverty line and there was a 15.1 percent unemployment rate, both significantly higher than other areas within Pima County. Nearly half of the population of Ajo identifies as being Hispanic or Latino, a group that continues to experience significant chronic disease disparities. The children of Ajo are at a significant risk as well. Data on the Ajo Unified School District shows that each grade had an obesity rate of at least 32 percent, with sixth grade reaching an alarming 57 percent (Lerman, Spock, & Walsh, 2011).

## Solution

The Nutri-Bike-Ajo Coalition is working to establish and connect partnerships to promote biking and increase opportunities for physical activity. The coalition will work to establish a community cycling center, building off of experiences in Tucson, AZ. Barriers to biking, such as economic and safety concerns, will be addressed. With more than 130 small towns in Arizona with populations between 1,000 and 6,000 residents, the coalition will create a replicable model for similar communities interested in embracing cycling for transportation, recreation, and as an economic driver.

## Your Involvement is Key

**To learn more about the Nutri-Bike-Ajo Coalition and all coalitions participating in Plan4Health, check out the project website ([www.plan4health.us](http://www.plan4health.us)). Join the national conversation at the intersection of planning and public health on social media by using and following #plan4health.**

## Results

The first stage of the community assessment included a bike-ability assessment and community survey that was completed by more than 70 community members and included questions on health status and barriers to bicycling. The assessment revealed a desire to promote eco-tourism in Ajo through mountain biking, which is a promising endeavor as “An estimated 13 percent of all spending on outdoor recreation trips in the U.S. is spent on bike trips.” (Outdoor Industry Association, 2012 The Economic Contributions of Outdoor Recreation: Technical Report, 2012.) We will disseminate mountain bike trail maps on partner websites and via bike shops in Pima County to start promoting Ajo as a mountain biking destination. As a result of the assessment, 24 community members have shown interest in joining the coalition and others have volunteered to become League Certified Bicycle Instructors to increase the community’s capacity to provide road safety classes.

### Contact

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*"I am very hopeful that we can find a positive and sustainable solution to biking in our community, especially in terms of bike repairs and providing health and safe riding education for all ages."*

**- Lily Williams, Desert Senita Community Health Center**

## Sustainable Success