Plan4Health Affiliate E-news Special Section – Plan4Health: A Spotlight on Three Years of Collaborative Work

The three-year Plan4Health project strengthened the connection between the planning and public health professions. Planning in the United States originated with a public health focus, and joined public health in the shared purpose of urban reform and disease prevention. The two professions have diverged, but these common roots reflect shared values: the built environment impacts all aspects of our health. By leveraging the complementary skills and expertise of planners and public health professionals, Plan4Health sought to expand innovative tactics to address tough problems.

As planners and public health professionals, Plan4Health engaged community members to make changes that will lead to healthier places. By bringing together the strengths of planning and public health — and building partnerships with organizations from a range of sectors and perspectives — Plan4Health can be a catalyst for collective action toward a healthier future!

Plan4Health is supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and led by the American Planning Association’s Planning and Community Health Center.

Plan4Health connected communities across the country, funding work at the intersection of planning and public health. Anchored by members of the American Planning Association and the American Public Health Association, Plan4Health supported creative partnerships to build sustainable, cross-sector coalitions.

Coalitions worked with communities to increase access to healthy food or increase opportunities for active living where residents live, work and play. The Plan4Health project built local capacity to address population health goals and promote the inclusion of health in non-traditional sectors.
Coalitions were made up of APA chapters, APHA Affiliates, local nonprofits, schools, parks and recreation departments, universities – and more! These coalitions will continue to strengthen strategies for healthy planning.

Read more about Healthy Planning Coalitions.

**Snapshots of Success**

During the three years of the project, two cohorts of 35 coalitions and 28 APA chapters participated in the Plan4Health or Planners4Health programs. Below you’ll find a series of vignettes featuring a mix of coalitions from Cohort 1 and 2 of the Plan4Health project and one from the Planners4Health APA chapters about the impact of the project on their coalition and communities.

**Kenton County, Kentucky**
Greater Cincinnati Regional Food Policy Council

The [Kenton County Plan4Health Coalition](#) held a food policy summit to kick off the start of the local food policy council. The Summit brought together over 20 exhibitors, with each exhibitor showcasing healthy and nutritious eating habits as well as local food production and consumption. There were several featured panel discussions about regional food system issues and the local food resources that were available.

The Summit also featured the local chefs’ collaborative preparing meals with a twist using locally sourced foods and environmentally sustainable dinnerware. The event began a dialogue around food system gaps and how to take action to create healthier communities.

Check out this video about the summit.

Part of the work of the Kenton County Plan4Health Coalition was the creation of a Story Map that encompasses the work done by the coalition during their project period.

In celebration of the work of the [Greater Cincinnati Regional Food Policy Council](#), the Council scheduled two food system tours to educate policymakers, the media and planners on the positive impacts a food
system had on their community. The goal was to provide key partners with a perspective that food system policy is important and a part of the policy portfolio that needed to be addressed.

The tours focused on two geographic areas: sites within Cincinnati and sites throughout Northern Kentucky. Tours included short stories from site managers about their successes, challenges and the programming offered. The tour participants met with and visited many stakeholders, including farmers, gardeners, distributors, processors and emergency food providers, to better understand the rich array of programs and activities that support economic development and food security in communities.

The 2017-2019 policy agenda of the Greater Cincinnati Regional Food Policy Council is divided into four areas:

- healthy food access and consumption
- distribution and procurement
- production and land use
- assessment, planning, zoning, and food waste

If you'd like more information about the work of the food policy council, check out the [Green Umbrella Regional Sustainability Alliance](#).

**Learn more about the work of the Kenton County Plan4Health Coalition.**

**Eastern Highlands, Connecticut**
Eastern Highlands Health District Community Health Action Response Team

Launched in 2010, the Eastern Highlands Health District Community Health Action Response Team has focused on environmental health and policy change among the 10 towns served by the District. Strategies for the Plan4Health project included assessing zoning policies and codes that have inhibited active transportation and developing a rural community toolkit.

The rural region of Eastern Connecticut is rich in natural beauty. With acres of forest and protected land, there are many multi-use trails and public parks that offer opportunities for walking, biking, swimming, boating and hunting. Many residents take part in these and other activities available to them by the well-resourced region. However, in a recent needs survey of residents within the region, community members in nine out of 10 towns felt that their town did not have a village center that is inviting to pedestrians, cyclists and families who want to engage in active play. Residential areas of the community are relatively disconnected from each other, as well as from commercial areas and spaces conducive to leisure and social activities. These factors lead to reduced physical activity among residents, which in turn leads to an increased risk for chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and stroke.

Small and rural planning and zoning commissions often have limited capacity. In response, the [Eastern Highlands (Connecticut) Health District Community Health Action Response Team](#) coalition developed a toolkit aimed at assisting planning and zoning commissions with understanding how planning can impact long-term public health. This toolkit is designed to support the Eastern Highlands Health District region
towns, as well as any other small, rural towns, in their efforts to enhance the quality of life in their communities through the prevention of illness, promotion of wellness and protection of our human environment.

Communities with ample opportunities to get and stay healthy are more desirable places to live. They offer clean air and water, ample food options, places to walk and bicycle comfortably and places for recreation. Healthy communities attract new residents and, in doing so, become more lively and dynamic. The Healthy Communities Toolkit provides land use managers with a compilation of various tools to help make their communities healthier places to live, work and play.

The toolkit that was created is a rich resource to enable similarly sized rural planning and zoning commissions to effectively plan or redevelop their communities. It contains a series of tools, both regulatory and planning, that focus on providing more options for growing communities.


St. Louis, Missouri
Healthy Eating Active Living Partnership

The Healthy Eating Active Living partnership aimed to reduce obesity in St. Louis, Missouri, by 5 percent by 2018. This project presented a vision for safe access to physical activity for pedestrians throughout the City of St. Louis. Engaging the community through pop-up demonstrations, the partnership addressed walkability and highlighted ways to build better streets with traffic calming solutions.

Out of the 115 counties in Missouri, St. Louis ranks in the bottom quartile for length of life, quality of life, and health behaviors. In St. Louis, nearly 60 percent of adults are overweight or obese, and 27 percent report no leisure time physical activity. St. Louis ranked below the state and nation with a score of 5.2 on the Food Environment Index. This indicates a large portion of the low-income population does not live within one mile of a grocery store. While 80 percent of City residents live within a half mile of a public park, comparatively better than the rest of Missouri, poor pedestrian access leads to a low level of park use. The HEAL Partnership is committed to increasing access to physical opportunities and to healthy food and beverages.

Trailnet is leading the Plan4Health initiative by working to make the streets of St. Louis safer and more accessible for residents in the most vulnerable neighborhoods. Trailnet worked with various community organizations and businesses to receive donated tires and trees to use in the pop-up traffic calming demonstrations. The trees that were used in the demonstrations were planted in one of the neighborhoods following the demonstration.

As part of the Plan4Health St. Louis project, the HEAL Partnership worked with local experts to create a variety of tools that can be used in temporary demonstrations for traffic calming. These tools were used
for pop-up demonstrations in: the Ville and Greater Ville; JeffVanderLou; Dutchtown; and Carondelet. The pop-up demonstrations offered possible solutions and provided fun and safe social spaces to St. Louis residents while also encouraging healthy, active living.

View a copy of the How-To Guide for Pop-Up Traffic Calming.

Baltimore, MD
Baltimore Greenway Trails Coalition

The Baltimore Greenway Trails Coalition sought to build a 35-mile urban trail network connecting existing trails to disconnected neighborhoods throughout Baltimore to each other, to parks, to anchor institutions, and to the downtown core. A pilot project focused on building community awareness and political support on a key trail gap in West Baltimore. The Coalition brought together a wide array of partners — from transportation professionals, public agencies, anchor institutions, the public health sector and community development organizations to open space advocates — to address health inequity and safety in transportation infrastructure.

The Greenway Trail Network project was intended to serve the entire city of Baltimore. However, the coalition chose to target specific communities in West Baltimore due to their specific barriers:

- being underserved by existing trail and active transportation infrastructure.
- having high barriers to physical activity due to the fragmented built environment.
- representing key gaps in the 35-mile Greenway Trail Network.

Current health, economic and built environment disparities exist in Baltimore. High physical inactivity rates (30 percent of residents report no physical activity; population of approximately 190,000) are 8 percent higher than the average for the state of Maryland and the United States. Residents also have high rates of chronic disease associated with a lack of physical activity: obesity (31 percent), Type 2 diabetes (12.4 percent), high blood pressure (33.4 percent), high cholesterol (35.6 percent) and heart disease (26 percent).

The targeted neighborhoods also have high rates of crime and violence, poor access to trails and parks, greater traffic-related risks due to busy streets and rail lines, and insufficient pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. The coalition advanced the development and completion of the 35-mile Baltimore trail networks with emphasis on recruiting organizations from the West Baltimore area. Over the project period, the coalition grew from seven organizations to 32 diverse, including four from the targeted West Baltimore area.

Currently, Baltimore’s social and economic difficulties make physical activity and green space access a low priority for city officials. The coalition has promoted structural change within the planning and health community in Baltimore, elevating the concept of trails as an area disparate organizations and
diverse sectors can convene around to work toward a common goal and share resources. This has happened by creating new forms of communication and partnership between city agencies such as the Departments of Planning, Health, Parks & Recreation, and Transportation.

As a result of the coalition’s work, these agencies are now able to work together to advocate change in Baltimore. The Health Department and the Parks and Recreation department are in communication, now sharing relevant programming and event schedules, and planning initiatives in order to help each other meet their goals of increasing opportunities for people to have healthy accessible options for physical activity. This type of coalition outcome will lead to increased collaboration in the future.

Ajo, Arizona
Bike Ajo

The Bike Ajo coalition worked to improve access to opportunities for physical activity by creating a sustainable cycling hub that: provides education on bicycle safety for recreation and transportation; trains local community members on bicycle repair; provides resources for bicycle repair and maintenance; certifies community members as League-Certified Cycling Instructors; and builds health-based partnerships with local Ajo organizations. Through building this capacity in the local community in a sustainable way, Ajo will be able to create economic growth through cycling, and we will create a replicable model for other rural communities interested in embracing cycling for transportation, recreation and as an economic driver.

Each coalition created a Community Action Plan to enable the coalition to complete targeted and specified goals related to their Plan4Health grant activities. The Bike Ajo coalition completed a community needs assessment to evaluate the assets and barriers to cycling for health, recreation and economic development in Ajo, Arizona. The target population was the total population of Ajo, amounting to approximately 3,700 people. The coalition conducted surveys, a literature review, SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis, road bike assessment and a Safe Routes to School assessment.

A Rural Cycling Hub featured resources for cycling, which included helmets, bicycles, LCIs (League Cycling Instructors), and health careers clubs. The hub is available to all Ajo residents and visitors, and the resources are available at two community locations, the Ajo Unified School District and the Desert Senita Community Health Center. These resources expanded and strengthened the Bike Ajo Coalition to ensure that the resources from the cycling hub are available to all Ajo residents and winter visitors and tourists.

Bike Ajo held a series of designed classes and community events to provide information about the work of the Bike Ajo coalition. These classes and community events focused on different types of information related to biking and cycling. These class topics were:

- Bike ability assessments
- Traffic skills
• Bike repair and mechanics
• Helmet fittings
• First bike rides
• Bike cleaning and repairs
• Safe Routes to Schools
• Biking programs at schools in the Unified School District for students
• Diabetes and bicycling connection
• Desert bike rides

These classes and community events built the skills and knowledge of community members about the benefits and accessibility of bicycling in the Ajo community. The involvement and outreach to students involved creation of health careers clubs at local high schools in the Ajo Unified School District with a focus on diabetes and cycling.

City of Dover/Kent County, Delaware
Delaware Coalition for Healthy Eating and Active Living

The Delaware Coalition for Healthy Eating and Active Living sought to change the way comprehensive plans are updated to include considerations for health and equity. Using feedback from the community, the Coalition created guidelines on land use, design and policy for planners and public health professionals seeking to increase access to healthy food and build spaces that encourage physical activity.

The Delaware Coalition of Healthy Eating and Active Living took a broader approach to their Plan4Health project and focused on the Kent County area of Dover, Delaware. They created a working group that reached 40 members and partners of the coalition. By enhancing the organizational capacity of the coalition, they were able to complete the following activities for the population of Kent County, which is approximately 169,000 people:

• Health and equity assessments which focused on policy, systems and environmental factors
• Planning and design sessions that were focused on listing all of the issues in a community and providing solutions; these sessions happened in two representative communities and reached approximately 40,000 people in the Dover/Kent County study area
• A comprehensive design and policy guidance document that includes community design, land use planning, active living and food security within community settings
• A communications and information dissemination plan for the Plan4Health working group, stakeholders and the general public. This plan reached approximately 22,000 unique visitors through the Plan4Health website, email and social media communication channels

To sustain the progress and resources from the Plan4Health project, the Delaware Healthcare Innovation Model’s Healthy Neighborhoods group became a new partner that will continue to focus on Plan4Health recommendations for implementation in key neighborhoods in the county, as well as the
entire state. With the Planners4Health grant aimed to expand Plan4Health efforts statewide, leveraging this new partner is timely in sustaining the momentum. In addition, each team member’s own network of partners has expanded as a result of this project. Therefore, this “culture of health” is becoming apparent as the different sectors are partnering to achieve common goals, while recognizing that health and planning naturally intersect.

*The reflection below was written by Tim Gibbs, the Executive Director for the Delaware Public Health Association*

In October of 2014, a dialogue started in Delaware based upon the announcement of CDC funding to advance community-based strategies to improve health and prevent chronic disease. That funding announcement went to American Planning Association leadership, and contained the key language that this program would be implemented in partnership with the American Planning Association. As Delaware’s affiliate to the APHA, we were delighted to be contacted.

To be candid, our organization (The Delaware Academy of Medicine / Delaware Public Health Association) was not very familiar with what the planning community was trained and responsible for in their work. Similarly, our Delaware planning colleagues were equally unfamiliar with us as an organization – although we soon learned that we had much in common. As we worked together (and with another Delaware group — Delaware Healthy Eating and Active Living – DE HEAL), our mutual understanding and respect grew and the alchemy of partnership happened. We stepped out of our respective silos and embraced the collaboration.

Even after the original project was successfully completed, the partnership remains intact. The Academy/DPHA invited one of the principle planners to join our own advisory council, and we committed resources to maintain the website and social media presence we had developed. We also committed to an issue of the *Delaware Journal of Public Health* focusing on the intersection of planning and public health – which is scheduled for early 2018. We also have a conference on the schedule for the fall of 2018 with the Delaware Chapter of the American Planning Association where health will be the focus. Most importantly, we all agreed to pursue additional funding opportunities and to plan to maintain our partnership for the well-being of the citizens of the State of Delaware, and along the way we developed new personal and professional connections that make all of our work more enjoyable.

*Planners4Health – American Planning Association*

The American Planning Association's widely successful Plan4Health program will continue to promote planning for healthy communities and chronic disease prevention in 2017 with Planners4Health. By bridging APA chapters and divisions, Planners4Health offers a new approach to advancing practice at the intersection of public health and planning. The American Planning Association funded 28 of its chapters through the Planners4Health initiative to continue to create stronger, healthier communities. The initiative is focused on greater coordination between planners and public health professionals at the state level.
Through Planners4Health, APA Chapters were responsible for:

- Identifying potential partners.
- Leveraging existing healthy community initiatives and efforts under way.
- Sharing planning and public health information.
- Bringing together key stakeholders.

Participating APA chapters created cross-disciplinary task forces to further develop policies, partnerships and place-based programs connecting health and planning in states and regions. The program serves both as an opportunity to disseminate lessons learned from previous Plan4Health work, and a chance to sustain the health agenda within APA. The following APA chapters received funding:

APA California       APA Nebraska
APA Arkansas         APA New Mexico
APA Colorado        APA New York Metro
APA Delaware        APA North Carolina
APA Florida         APA Northern New England
APA Georgia         APA Ohio
APA Hawaii          APA Oregon
APA Illinois        APA Pennsylvania
APA Indiana         APA Rhode Island
APA Iowa            APA Tennessee
APA Kansas          APA Texas
APA Louisiana       APA Utah
APA Minnesota       APA Washington
APA Missouri        APA Wisconsin

A cornerstone of Planners4Health was a six-part curriculum series guiding members through each step of the project. The six sessions were:

Session One: Assessing the Healthy Communities Landscape
Session Two: What We Measure Matters: Metrics, Data, Sources, and Methodologies
Session Three: Applying an Equity Lens
Session Four: Building Coalitions and Engaging the Community (closed session for grantees at NPC)
Session Five: Communications: Framing, Messaging, and Marketing
Session Six: Sustaining Momentum

Planners4Health marks the culmination of APA’s three-year, Plan4Health program.
If you’re interested in collaborating or learning more about the intersection between planning and public health, the American Planning Association offers a free online learning program for planning and health professionals. This free course covers:

- Assessing the Healthy Communities Landscape;
- What we Measure Matters: Metrics, Data, Sources and Methodologies;
- Building Coalitions and Engaging the Community;
- Communications: Framing, Messaging, and Marketing; and
- Sustaining Momentum and Investing in Change

APA requires a simple sign-in process, which will allow you to come back and visit the course at any time.

For additional information and resources, check out the Plan4Health Peer Learning Network page. The network was used to elevate and to amplify the expertise of Plan4Health coalitions by showcasing their amazing work.

You can also join the Healthy Communities Collaborative, a listserv comprised of individuals who have been involved with Plan4Health, Planners4Health, and/or has partnered with APA on their healthy communities initiatives to learn about sustaining this work. Contact health@planning.org to sign up.