LG INSTITUTE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

GUIDE TO PLANNING HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOODS:
Tips for Getting Started

Local officials can play a leadership role in efforts to improve community health. Planning decisions can influence health positively by presenting opportunities for healthy behavior or negatively by restricting access to healthy options. Key land-use characteristics that affect health include:

- Patterns of land use within a community or neighborhood;

- The design and construction of spaces and buildings; and

- The transportation systems that connect people to places.

Physical activity and proper nutrition can largely prevent many chronic diseases, such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes. In response to the rising rates of chronic disease, many local agencies are adopting land-use measures that support healthy eating and active living.

Tips for Getting Started

1. **Scan:** What Has Been Done?

2. **Assess:** What Are the Needs?

3. **Identify:** What Are the Opportunities?

The *Guide to Planning Healthy Neighborhoods* includes information on land use and planning strategies to improve community health and resources to assist in crafting local efforts. The following tips are intended to help local officials consider which strategies and resources best fit the situation in their particular neighborhood or community.

1. Scan - What Has Been Done?

Knowing what is already being done or has been tried in the past is an essential first step. A scan can identify strategies that have been successful in previous efforts, uncover areas of redundancy, and highlight useful lessons that can be applied to future efforts. Further, renewing relationships with past partners through a scan can be a great way to identify allies and resources.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

☑ Are there local programs or policies that have been adopted to specifically improve the health and safety of residents? Have these programs or policies had a noticeable effect on health conditions? What factors or features help or hinder their effectiveness?

☑ Are there programs or policies put in place for reasons other than health that have had the co-benefit – whether intended or unintended – of improving the health of residents?

☑ Are community-based organizations already working to improve the health or safety of local neighborhoods? Are there particular local officials or departments that have been especially successful working with the community to identify and address health, safety, and related concerns?

☑ Have other public agencies or outside organizations partnered with the local agency (or with one another) to leverage resources and successfully improve resident's health? What have been the results of these community partnerships?

2. Assess – What Are the Community's Needs?

The purpose of this step is to gather information to understand the baseline health and quality-of-life needs of the community. While statistical data is important, listening to residents articulate their needs and concerns can augment the understanding of the challenges facing residents. Engaging the community also provides an opportunity to brainstorm solutions that capitalize on the residents' strengths and expertise.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

☑ What are the most serious or prevalent health issues facing the community? Are there trends in how these health issues have evolved over time?

☑ Are there particular groups of residents that are especially vulnerable to certain health risks or environmental hazards? Are health indicators linked to geographic location or socio-economic status?

☑ What are the opportunities to access nutritious food? Which neighborhoods have access to full-service grocery stores? Are there other sources of healthy food available – such as farmers markets, community gardens, or community-supported agriculture?

☑ Can residents find safe and convenient places to be physically active? What is the ratio of park space to residents and what is the condition of the parks? How many miles of trails and bikeways exist?

☑ Are there environmental hazards located near schools, residences, or other populated places? Where are areas with high rates of preventable injury to pedestrians and bicyclists?

3. Identify – What Are the Opportunities to Get Started?

After conducting a scan to inventory past efforts and collecting data to assess key areas of need, the next step is to identify the most promising opportunities to address the needs. In some instances local officials may want to launch a new initiative for planning healthy neighborhoods. However, in many cases the existing planning process provides opportunities to integrate health considerations into land use decisions more quickly and cost-effectively.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

☑ Are there current or past policies or programs related to health and planning that can be built upon to broaden their reach, scope or effectiveness?

☑ Is the local agency (or a partner organization) eligible to apply for particular funding sources to support healthy neighborhood policies or programs?

☑ Are there planning documents in development or ready for review that can be improved by incorporating health language or by including a health impact assessment?

☑ Are there particular programs or projects in the local agency's capital or operating budget that could be bolstered or modified to deliver health co-benefits?

More information is available in the *Guide to Planning Healthy Neighborhoods* and at www.ca-ilg.org/healthyneighborhoods.