

Plan4Health: Healthy Communities Interest Group

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.

Coalitions work with communities to increase access to healthy food or increase opportunities for active living where residents live, learn, work, and play. The Plan4Health project aims to build local capacity to address population health goals and promote the inclusion of health in non-traditional sectors. Just as Plan4Health coalitions are anchored by APA chapters and APHA affiliates, APA's Planning and Community Health Center is partnering with APHA at the national level. This key partnership ensures coalitions are supported throughout the project period – and that conversations and lessons learned at the local level are part of the national agenda to prevent chronic diseases.



CHALLENGE

Chronic diseases account for more than two-thirds of deaths in the United States and prior to death, have a significant negative impact on quality of life and productivity for sufferers. Race, socioeconomic status, and other social disadvantages are associated with high rates of chronic disease (CDC 2013). By increasing opportunities for people to engage in healthy behaviors, chronic diseases and their impacts can be diminished. Planning in the United States

originated with a public health purpose. To address issues that resulted from rapid urbanization, federal, state, and local governments created a series of policies related to zoning, housing, and transportation. These policies have had lasting impacts on the ways we develop the built environment often resulting in unanticipated, detrimental health effects. Through an ecological model of health, we know that health outcomes are shaped by more than individual behaviors and clinical care.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

Plan4Health resources are open to all APA and APHA members – and we want to hear more about what you need to integrate planning and public health where you live, work, and play.

To learn more about our national partnership and all coalitions participating in Plan4Health, check out the project website: www.plan4health.us and contribute to the Peer Learning Network. Join the national conversation at the intersection of planning and public health on social media by using and following [#plan4health](https://twitter.com/plan4health).

"Success looks like an EKG monitor."

- Healthy Communities Interest Group member

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SOLUTION

In addition to funding 35 coalitions across the country, APA and APHA have also supported the growth of a health affinity group within APA called the Healthy Communities Interest Group (HCIG). The positive response from APA members to the original Plan4Health project announcement made it clear that members are interested in learning more about the intersection of health and planning. The Planning and Community Health Center spearheaded the development of the HCIG as a mechanism for fostering conversations about health across the organization.

RESULTS

The HCIG was reinvigorated in March 2016 through the development of a listserv, which became increasingly robust as more members joined. The growth in number of people, both APA members and others, was fast and evidence of the level of interest in health. The HCIG began developing and distributing a monthly newsletter beginning in May of 2016. The communication mechanisms have been a great way for peers to share information with each other, as well as for the Planning and Community Health Center to share updates about Plan4Health and upcoming events. The level of participation in webinars and peer calls from HCIG members has been high.

As the HCIG gains traction, the group will be lead by members of the group rather than APA staff. The leadership team was beginning to coalesce in the fall of 2016. It is projected that the HCIG will be an independently functioning group by 2017. APA staff will continue to support efforts among members to link public health and planning, but the activities and goals of the group will be member-driven.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

Partners at the national and local levels have allowed Plan4Health to be successful. Plan4Health will maintain a sense of urgency and excitement with partners through the Peer Learning Network (PLN). Launched in January 2016, the PLN is an online forum to unite professionals, community members, organizations, and peer experts involved in the healthy communities movement. The network is currently centered on Plan4Health coalitions to provide a platform to maintain connections with coalitions and to foster cross-cohort learning. Featuring mini-webinars, videos, and podcasts, the PLN provides an opportunity for Plan4Health coalitions to share their experiences directly with each other.

By capturing the experiences of the coalitions, the project will continue to inform the national agenda for chronic disease prevention and to contribute to the evidence-base of effective interventions, ensuring we are able to support communities' efforts to create healthy, vibrant homes.