

Plan4Health: Pathways to Health

by: Joani Dotson

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. Pathways to Health will create greater access to locally grown foods, reduce barriers to physical activity, and promote a health in all policies approach to changes in communities across Tulsa County.



CHALLENGE

Tulsa County, OK is the most densely populated county in the state, with a population of more than 600,000.

Oklahoma chronic disease rates are concerning: rates of obesity (27.8 percent), diabetes (13.6 percent) and hypertension (36.3 percent) are all worse than the national average.

Oklahoma also ranked poorly among states for fruit and vegetable consumption; only 16.5 percent of adults in Tulsa County consumed adequate amounts of fruits and

vegetables. The number of grocery stores is much less than the national average and the number of fast food restaurants much greater. In Tulsa County, 17 percent of adults and 23 percent of children are food insecure. Additionally, Tulsa County ranked poorly with a walkability rating of 45.8, which is a contributing factor to why nearly one-third of adults do not participate in any physical activities.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

To learn more about Plan4Health check out the project website (www.plan4health.us) and join the national conversation by using and following #plan4health. The coalition is also engaging in the Tulsa County Community Health Improvement Plan – check it out here!

SUCCESSFUL MOMENT

We now have a seat on the local Planning Commission thanks to our work on this project.

"This project has been the catalyst for so much health improvement focused activity in our community, and the momentum continues to build."

- Leslie Carroll
Pathways to Health

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SOLUTION

Pathways to Health works with community partners to reduce barriers to physical activity and nutrition by focusing resources on areas of need and strengthening cross-sector partnerships. Baseline data were collected and assets mapped to identify opportunities to expand shared use agreements and establish “Food Forests” to increase the availability and consumption of healthy foods. Toolkits were created for assessing the impact of the built environment on public health and the coalition is engaging in a Walkability community education and health assessment tool.

RESULTS

Through this project, the team was able to get three of the four largest school districts in the county on board with a shared use strategy called Places to Play, an online interactive map of all the shared use playgrounds in the school districts. But the shared use strategy is just getting started. In order to sustain this effort, the team is collaborating with another school district on developing two Chalk Art parks in hopes to bring them on board with the Places to Play project. Additionally, the team is working with the school districts to install wayfinding signs in neighborhoods around the shared use facilities to encourage neighbors to use the facilities to be physically active. So far the team has 17 schools signed on to participate.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

One piece of the project that the coalition is really excited about is the development of not just one, but four Food Forests across Tulsa County. By leveraging community partnerships, the team was able to take the vision of a single Food Forest and translate that into four in the most economically and food insecure parts of the community. While these written agreements between partners help to ensure the sustainability of the forest management and harvest, a hugelkultur bed model also established a natural method for ensuring sustainability of the plants in the Food Forest. Hugelkultur beds will allow the forests to withstand drought, flooding and have greater nutrient distribution to sustain fruit, nut and berry harvests for years to come.

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