

# Plan4Health: Jackson County Healthy Communities Coalition

by: Miriam Link-Mullison

## 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 Jackson County Healthy Communities Coalition will build off of the existing master plan and community outreach initiatives to expand and reshape policies, systems, and spaces to encourage healthy behaviors in rural Jackson County.



## CHALLENGE

Jackson County, located in rural southern Illinois, has a population of 59,814 and a median income of approximately \$32,000, well below the national average. Cardiovascular disease and associated risk factors, including diabetes and obesity, have been identified as ongoing concerns. The age-adjusted death rate for coronary heart disease, stroke, and high cholesterol are all higher than the target goals set forth by Healthy People 2020. In 2007, only 27% of

residents met the recommended physical activity guidelines compared to 52% in Illinois. Additionally, over 80% of residents did not consume the recommended five fruits and vegetables daily. Residents have limited access to retail food stores; convenience stores in Jackson County were rated poorly on healthy foods offerings. Less than 20% of a typical household budget is spent on fresh produce, while more than 40% is spent on processed snack foods.

## YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

To learn more about Plan4Health check out the project website ([www.plan4health.us](http://www.plan4health.us)) and join the national conversation by using and following #plan4health.

*"The Farmers Market's SNAP and Double Value Coupon program gave hundreds of families more access to healthy and fresh food grown in Southern Illinois, not to mention keeping thousands of more dollars circulating in the local economy."*

- Jerry Bradley  
Carbondale Farmers Market

## Contact

### Miriam Link-Mullison

Jackson County Health Department  
Murphysboro, IL  
Murphysboro, IL 62966  
618-684-3143 phone  
<http://www.jchdonline.org/>

## SOLUTION

The Jackson County Healthy Communities Coalition implemented a healthy convenience store program to increase access to nutritious foods in rural communities. Coalition members also coordinated and expanded existing initiatives to increase the availability and accessibility of healthy foods at farmers' markets. The coalition created new bike plans, multi-use paths and a toolkit for rural communities to promote physical activity for all. The coalition held a worksite wellness forum to engage businesses and distributed Worksite Wellness toolkits and starter kits. Over 100 attendees from across the region attended the forum. Additionally, the coalition developed an educational workshop for city officials, providing expertise, resources, and skills needed to develop strategies using planning principles to enhance public health in rural communities.

## RESULTS

Please share an activity or successful moment that represents how your project has impacted—or will impact—the community. In addition to helping expand and strengthen the Jackson County Healthy Communities Coalition, the Jackson County Plan4Health project produced many tangible resources, including toolkits that can be utilized in other areas. The two most notable documents include the: 1) Worksite Wellness Starter Kit, a document that provides guidance and materials to help a business get started on creating a Worksite Wellness program, and 2) Rural Planning Playbook, a reference for rural communities to strategically incorporate planning principles into the design of their communities in order to enhance the health of the residents. The documents will continue to be distributed at workshops and events in southern Illinois to increase the capacity of rural communities to foster healthy living. These documents can be found at: <http://www.hsidn.org/resources.html>.

## SUSTAINING SUCCESS

The Coalition has a long history of mobilizing local resources to tackle public health issues in the community and will continue to leverage the strength of these relationships. Action teams have been developed that address cardiovascular health utilizing a policy, systems and environmental approach to increase access to physical activity and healthy nutrition. Additional funding has been sought and received to continue this work. Current funds will support recruitment of university students to engage in these initiatives, providing a sustainable workforce, while simultaneously promoting health equity in the community. More information on the work of the coalition and action teams can be found here: <http://www.hsidn.org/jackson-county-healthy-communities-coalition.html>.

## SUCCESSFUL MOMENT

Jackson County Plan4Health staff member Angie Kuehl was recognized by the Illinois Stewardship Alliance for her progressive work to promote healthy eating through innovative programming at local farmers' markets and rural convenience stores.

Plan4Health is made possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The views expressed in this success story do not necessarily reflect the official policies of the CDC or imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. Learn more about Plan4Health and the National Implementation and Dissemination for Chronic Disease Prevention project at [www.cdc.gov/communityhealth](http://www.cdc.gov/communityhealth).