



Health Action Plans: A Process for Integrating Health

The Connection: Health through Housing

In the United States, it's common practice to detect and treat disease in medical settings. Yet the origins of illness can be identified long before someone enters a doctor's office.

An estimated 70 percent of differences in health status are associated with people's social and physical environment, including the quality, affordability, stability and location of a person's home. The result is striking disparities that adversely affect low-income communities.

As a proven and powerful nonprofit that improves communities and people's lives by making well-designed homes affordable, Enterprise Community Partners recognizes its role in laying a foundation for health and well-being nationwide.

We foster community improvement from the ground up, connecting homes to health care and other important resources like schools, economic mobility and transit.

For more than 30 years, we have brought together nationwide know-how, partners, and policy leadership and investment to multiply the impact of local development. We also developed the standards to create greener, healthier communities.

We know there's more work to be done and we will continue finding innovative solutions because where you live affects the life – and health – you can have.

Improving Health through Affordable Housing

One of Enterprise's most successful and widely-used tools – the Enterprise Green Communities Criteria – is an industry standard for green and healthy building. As of 2015, the Criteria includes a framework designed to address key health issues facing the community. This process, the Health Action Plan framework, identifies five Resident Health Campaigns that encompass many of the health issues that disproportionately affect low-income communities: injury and accessibility; asthma and respiratory health; cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes and obesity; cancer and health outcomes related to toxin exposure; and mental health.

Based on a review of local public health data and input from residents and other community stakeholders, community development organizations and public health partners develop a Health Action Plan that may focus on one or more of the Resident Health Campaigns or may identify additional concerns that are especially relevant to the community.

The framework asks community development organizations to:

- **Commit** to embedding health into site design and operation
- **Partner** with public health professionals to maximize outcomes
- **Collect and analyze** community health data to understand how it can influence design
- **Engage community stakeholders** to prioritize health needs and maximize health outcomes

Developing a Health Action Plan is just one step of the process. The accompanying Implementation and Monitoring plan ensures that the strategies adopted during the design phase are performing as expected and are positively contributing to resident health and well-being.

The Health Action Plan framework was inspired by the Health Impact Assessment model and developed to explicitly link community health needs with building design decisions. The framework was developed in collaboration with the U.S. Green Building Council and the Health Impact Project.



Health Action Plan Pilot Project

To evaluate the ability of affordable housing developers to develop a Health Action Plan, Enterprise launched a five-month pilot evaluation in mid-2016. The evaluation was designed to uncover barriers to implementation, to identify specific tools and resources that community development organizations and their consultants would need for success, and to document the impact of the adoption of the Health Action Plan framework. Five community development organizations were chosen to participate:

- Grant Housing & Economic Development Corporation, Los Angeles, CA
- Gulf Coast Housing Partnership, Hammond, LA
- Latin United Community Housing Association, Chicago, IL
- Mercy Housing Southeast, Atlanta, GA
- SKA Marin, East Harlem, NY

Each organization received a \$10,000 grant to partner with a local public health professional, technical assistance and access to a peer network. Throughout the pilot, Enterprise observed how groups implemented the Health Action Plan framework and how participation affected their capacity. We also examined the factors influencing design decisions, and looked to learn how likely each organization would be to implement the Health Action Plan framework in the future.

“Before this pilot, we didn’t realize that place and design can intersect to increase the health and wellness of our residents.”

– Mercy Housing Southeast, Atlanta

Results

The Health Action Plan framework was designed to help community development organizations collaborate with public health professionals and community stakeholders to assess, identify, implement, and monitor achievable actions to enhance health-promoting features and minimize features that could present risks to health. The pilot evaluation illustrated success: that the Health Action Plan process is an effective way to address health needs in the development of affordable homes. While each organization took a unique approach, we observed consistent findings:

- **Commitment:** Developers gained a deeper understanding of the relationship between health and the built environment.
- **Cross-Sector Partnerships:** Partnership with a public health professional proved important but finding the right fit took time.
- **Data Collection & Analysis:** Understanding local data was essential to the process.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Community engagement was pivotal in prioritizing health needs, demonstrating “residents are the experts on what they’re experiencing.”

In addition to these organizational capacity changes, we learned through the evaluation that developers spent \$10,000 to \$15,000 on implementation. The majority of costs were associated with contracting a public health professional and staff time spent on the process. About 90 to 164 staff hours were spent on completing the Health Action Plan.

Critical Insights

Engagement with the community and a public health professional had the greatest influence on cohort members’ development decisions. The greatest value the developers attributed to the process was learning about the health issues facing their communities and deepening their understanding of how they can impact these issues through the built environment.