

Prepared by the American Planning Association and the National Association of County and City Health Officials with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

# Public Health Terms for Planners & Planning Terms for Public Health Professionals



## Fact Sheet

**P**lanners and public health officials are forging new partnerships to achieve shared goals in their jurisdictions. These goals include understanding the impact of neighborhood design on residents' ability to be physically active, the impacts of development on natural systems such as aquifer recharge and groundwater contamination, and the effects of transportation facilities and automobile use on air quality and personal mobility.

To succeed in such partnerships, each profession will have a significant language barrier to overcome. While the meaning of various acronyms, terms, and concepts used in the respective fields requires little or no explanation when one is speaking to or writing for an audience of fellow public health professionals or fellow planners, the case is quite different when one addresses professionals from outside the field. In some cases, each field may use the same term, but define it in a much different way.

This fact sheet is provided to planners, public health professionals, and all others who are interested in the benefits of interdisciplinary collaboration between the two fields. It can be used as a starting point for discussions between public health professionals and planners who are launching a collaborative effort or as a quick reference guide for the many public health professionals and planners that are already collaborating to improve the health of residents by addressing the effects of planning and community design.



### **PUBLIC HEALTH TERMS**

#### *Access*

In public health terms, access means the ability to obtain needed health care services.

#### *ATSDR*

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry is part of the Department of Health and Human Services. The agency is mandated by the federal superfund law to assess health risks from hazardous waste sites on the National Priority List. ATSDR determines if additional health studies are needed at these sites, provides health advisories, and publishes toxicological profiles on chemicals found at hazardous waste sites. ATSDR also maintains exposure registries of people exposed to certain substances.

#### *BRFSS*

The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is a telephone questionnaire initially developed by the CDC in the early 1980s to collect state-level data to monitor state-level prevalence of the major behavioral risks among adults associated with premature morbidity and mortality, such as cigarette smoking and inactivity.

#### *Behavior/Healthy Behavior*

Behavior is the combination of knowledge, practices and attitudes that together contribute to motivate actions we take regarding our own health. Healthy behavior may promote and preserve good health.

#### *CDC*

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is part of the Department of Health and Human



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Services. It provides federal leadership in the prevention and control of diseases.

### **Chronic disease**

Chronic disease describes a health condition that occurs over a long period of time, e.g., several weeks, months, or years.

### **Environmental Factor**

An environmental factor is an extrinsic factor (e.g., geology, climate, insects, sanitation, health services, etc.) that affects the agent and the opportunity for exposure.

### **Environmental health**

(National Center for Environmental Health definition)

Environmental health is the discipline that focuses on the interrelationships between people and their environment, promotes human health and well-being, and fosters a safe and healthful environment.

### **Epidemiology**

Epidemiology is the study of the distribution and determinants of health-related states or events in specified populations, and the application of this study to the control of health problems.

### **Health disparities**

Health disparities indicate the difference in the incidence, prevalence, mortality, and burden of diseases and other adverse health conditions that exist among specific population groups.

### **Health indicator**

A health indicator is a measure that reflects, or indicates, the state of health of persons in a defined population, such as the infant mortality rate.

### **Health Impact Assessment (HIA)**

Health impact assessment refers to any combination of qualitative and quantitative methods used to assess the population health consequences of a policy, project, or program that does not have health as its primary objective (i.e., assessing the health consequences of non-health-sector actions).

### **Healthy People 2010**

A program of the Department of Health and Human Services, *HP 2010* is a nationwide health promotion and disease prevention agenda. Its primary goals are to increase the quality and years of life and to minimize health disparities among Americans.

### **Health promotion**

Health promotion means the process of enabling people to increase control over and to improve their health.

### **Indicator**

In public health terms, an indicator variable helps to measure changes directly or indirectly. It also makes it possible to assess the success of a program's efforts in achieving its goals. In medicine, indicators help to measure changes in the health situation of a given population (e.g., the elderly).

### **Infectious disease**

An infectious disease is caused by the presence of disease-causing organisms or agents, such as bacteria, viruses, and parasitic worms. (See also *chronic disease*.)

### **Injury prevention**

Injury prevention strategies focus primarily on environmental design (e.g., road construction that permits optimum visibility), product design, human behavior, education, and legislative and regulatory requirements that support environmental and behavioral change.

### **Intervention**

An intervention is the act or fact of interfering with a condition to modify it or with a process to change its course.

### **NACCHO**

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) is the national nonprofit organization representing local public health agencies (including city, county, metro, district, and Tribal agencies). NACCHO provides education, information, research, and technical assistance to local public health agencies and facilitates partnerships among local, state, and federal agencies in order to promote and strengthen public health.

### **NCEH**

The National Center for Environmental Health (NCEH) is one of numerous centers at CDC. Its mission is "to provide national leadership, through science and service, that promotes health and quality of life by preventing or controlling those diseases, birth defects, disabilities, or deaths that result from interactions between people and their environment." The main activities of NCEH include public health surveillance, applied research, statistical and laboratory analyses, and training programs for state and local health officials.

### **NIH**

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) is part of the Department of Health and Human Services. The institute conducts scientific research into the causes, prevention and cure of diseases.

### **NHANES**

The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) is conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics, CDC (NCHS/CDC). The survey, which takes between four and six years to complete, has been conducted three times since 1971. It is designed to assess the health and nutritional status of adults and children in the U.S. through interviews and direct physical examinations of approximately 30,000 children, adults, and elderly people.

### **Obesity**

Obesity is defined as an excessively high amount of body fat or adipose tissue in relation to lean body mass.

### **Overweight**

Overweight refers to increased body weight in relation to height, when compared to some standard of acceptable or desirable weight.

### **PACE EH**

*Protocol for Assessing Community Excellence in Environmental Health (PACE EH)* is an environmental health assessment tool developed by NACCHO intended for users to identify environmental health related issues, develop indicators, and develop action plans to address them in order to improve local

environmental public health status. NACCHO staff conduct regional trainings for departments interested in using the tool.

### **Prevention**

In public health terms, prevention means actions that reduce exposure or other risks, keep people from getting sick, or keep disease from getting worse.

### **Public health**

Public health is a set of organized interdisciplinary efforts to protect, promote, and restore the public's health. It is the combination of assessment, policy development and assurance that is directed to the maintenance and improvement of the health of all the people through collective or social actions. The mission of public health is to "Promote physical, mental and environmental health and prevent disease, injury and disability.

*Source: Institute of Medicine (1988). The Future of Public Health. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.*

*Blueprint for a Healthy Community (1994). Washington, DC: National Association of County Health Officials.)*

### **Quality of life**

In public health terms, quality of life means the degree to which individuals perceive themselves as able to function physically, emotionally and socially. In a general sense, it is that which makes life worth living. In a more quantitative sense, it refers to a person's time remaining alive, free of impairment, disability, or handicap.

### **Social capital**

Social capital refers to the institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society's social interactions.

### **Social marketing**

Social marketing is the application of commercial marketing technologies to the analysis, planning, execution, and evaluation of programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences in order to improve their personal health and welfare and that of their society.

### **Surveillance**

In public health terms, surveillance means the ongoing, systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of health data. This activity also involves timely dissemination of the data and use for public health programs.

## **LAND USE PLANNING TERMS**

### **APA**

The American Planning Association is a nonprofit public interest and research organization representing 33,000 practicing planners, officials, and citizens involved with urban and rural planning issues. APA's objective is to encourage planning that will meet the needs of people and society more effectively.

### **Built environment**

In planning terms, the built environment consists of all buildings, roads, utilities, homes, fixtures, parks, and all other improvements that form the physical character of a city.

### **Cluster development**

Cluster development allows a parcel to be considered in its entirety and permits development that is concentrated on a portion of a tract, leaving the rest of a tract undeveloped. Clustering is accomplished by allowing the same number of houses as traditional zoning but reducing the size of lots, setbacks, yards, and other dimensional requirements.

### **Community**

A community is subarea of a city consisting of residential, institutional, and commercial uses sharing a common identity. Alternately, planners use the term "community" as shorthand to refer to all jurisdictions, irrespective of type (e.g., city or county) or size (e.g., large cities or a neighborhood within a city).

### **Community character**

Community character is the image of a community or area as defined by such factors as its built environment, natural features and open space

elements, type of housing, architectural style, infrastructure, and the type and quality of public facilities and services.

### **Community design (also called Urban design)**

Community design is the process of giving form, in terms of both function and aesthetic beauty—to selected urban areas or to whole cities. It is concerned with the location, mass, and design of various urban components and combines elements of urban planning, architecture, and landscape architecture.

### **Comprehensive plan (also called General plan or Master plan)**

The adopted official statement of a legislative body of a local government that sets forth (in words, maps, illustrations, or tables) goals, policies, and guidelines intended to direct the present and future physical, social, and economic development that occurs within its planning jurisdiction and that includes a unified physical design for the public and private development of land and water.

### **Development review**

Development review consists of the processes conducted by a jurisdiction, of review and approval of applications for any of the following: (1) a site development plan; (2) zoning or rezoning; (3) general, preliminary, or final development plan; (4) final or preliminary subdivision plat; (5) annexation; (6) variance; (7) project development plan; (8) overall development plan; (9) lot merger; (10) boundary line adjustment; (11) zoning compliance plan; or (12) appeal.

### **New Urbanism**

New Urbanism is a planning and urban design movement begun in the mid-1980s that aims to reintegrate the components of modern life—housing, workplace, shopping and recreation—into compact, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use neighborhoods linked by transit and set in a larger regional open space framework.

### **Pedestrian friendly**

In basic terms, pedestrian friendly describes a street or area that has sidewalks on both sides of the roadway and has safe street crossings. In broader terms, it denotes a street, neighborhood, or city that supports, through planning and zoning, the location of stores, offices, residences, schools, recreational areas, and other public facilities within walking distance of each other. Such areas also often feature narrow streets, street trees, awnings, covered transit shelters, benches, brick paving or other less conventional paving types, among other elements.

### **PUD**

A Planned Unit Development (PUD) is a large parcel of land for which a unified development plan has been prepared indicating the following: open space, on-site circulation for both pedestrians and vehicles, parking, setbacks, housing densities, building spacing, land coverage, landscaping, relationships, streets, building heights, accessory uses, architectural treatment, and other elements.

### **Quality of life**

In planning terms, quality of life means the attributes or amenities that combine to make an area a good place to live. Examples include the availability of political, educational, and social support systems; good relations among constituent groups; a healthy physical environment; and economic opportunities for both individuals and businesses.

### **Smart growth**

Smart growth is development that serves the economy, the community, and the environment. It changes the terms of the development debate away from the traditional growth/no growth question to “how and where should new development be accommodated.” Principles include:

1. Mix land uses
2. Take Advantage of Compact Building Design
3. Create a Range of Housing Opportunities and Choices
4. Create Walkable Neighborhoods

5. Foster Distinctive, Attractive Communities with a Strong Sense of Place
6. Preserve Open Space, Farmland, Natural Beauty, and Critical Environmental Areas
7. Strengthen and Direct Development Towards Existing Communities
8. Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices
9. Make Development Decisions Predictable, Fair, and Cost Effective
10. Encourage Community and Stakeholder Collaboration in Development Decisions

### **TND**

Traditional neighborhood development (TND), is development that exhibits several or all of the following characteristics: alleys, streets laid out in a grid system, buildings oriented to the street, front porches on houses, pedestrian-orientation, compatible and mixed land uses, village squares and greens. (See also *New Urbanism*.)

### **Traffic calming**

Traffic calming means a strategic set of physical changes to streets to reduce vehicle speeds and volumes. It refers to the use of street design techniques, such as curb extensions, traffic circles and speed humps, to slow and control the flow of automobile traffic.

### **TOD**

A transit-oriented development (TOD) is a mixed-use community within an approximate 2,000-foot walking distance of a transit stop and core commercial area. TODs mix residential, retail, office, and public uses in a walkable environment, making it convenient for residents and employees to travel by transit, bicycle, foot, or car.

### **Universal design**

Universal design is the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.

### **Urban sprawl**

Urban sprawl is characterized by low density residential, commercial, development at the urban fringe. A jurisdiction's definition of sprawl—or identification of urban sprawl as a problem—will depend on the general characteristics of the area (e.g., a rural farming community vs. a growing suburb in a large metropolitan area), historical settlement patterns, the rate of growth, and future population and employment growth projections. Characteristics of sprawl include: (a) The premature or poorly planned conversion of rural land to urbanized uses; (b) urbanized development that is poorly connected to other land uses in the immediate area; and (c) urban development or uses that fail to maximize existing public facilities or that occurs outside areas where public services are currently planned for expansion.

### **VMT**

Vehicle miles traveled (VMT) is a primary indicator of automobile use. One vehicle traveling one mile constitutes a vehicle mile.

### **Zoning**

Zoning is the division of a city or county into areas, or zones, which specify allowable uses for real property and size restrictions for buildings within these areas. It is the chief land use implementation tool for the comprehensive plan. A zoning ordinance or zoning code is the legal document that describes each zoning district, the regulations applicable within each district, and a zoning map that depicts each district.

For more information on land use planning and community design, contact NACCHO's Environmental Health Program at (202) 783-5550, [www.naccho.org/project84.cfm](http://www.naccho.org/project84.cfm) or the American Planning Association at (312) 786-6375, [www.planning.org](http://www.planning.org).