

# Fostering Healthy Communities through Planning and Public Health Collaboration

Planners and public health professionals are key contributors to fostering vibrant and healthier communities. Together, they can pursue opportunities for change that support the health, safety, and welfare of community.

The planning and public health professions share a similar origin story. Both professions developed to address deteriorating living conditions in cities, such as poor sanitation, substandard housing, and outbreaks of infectious diseases and initially worked together closely on these issues before the disciplines grew apart.



# Serving Communities, Together

Communities stand to benefit from collaborations between public health professionals and planners. Together, they can protect the health, safety, and welfare of the people they serve.

## Why should public health professionals collaborate with planners?

Planners:

- Influence projects that shape the built environment, which is an integral social determinant of health.
- Raise awareness among community members and decision-makers that healthy communities can promote economic prosperity.
- Elevate health considerations within big picture community and planning processes.

## Why should planners collaborate with public health professionals?

Public health professionals:

- Play key roles in collecting and sharing community health data.
- Communicate the importance of planning decisions for promoting community health, safety, and welfare.
- Engage community members in a way that is inclusive and representative of all perspectives.



## Shared Priorities: Planning and Public Health

**Social** components, including impacts to community health.

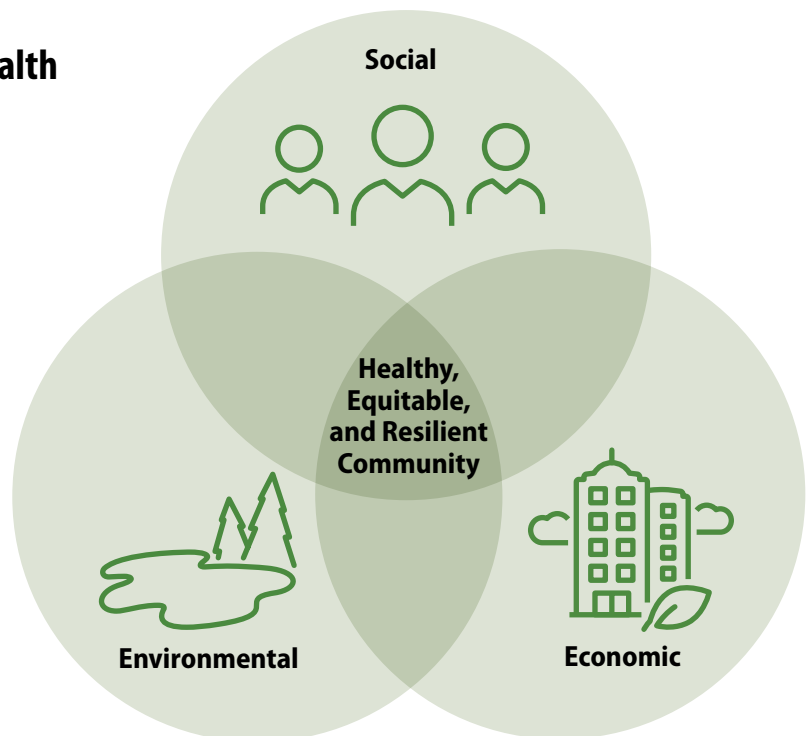
- Public engagement
- Social cohesion
- Safe, affordable housing
- High-quality, affordable education

**Environmental** components, including the built environment.

- Clean air, water, and soil
- Climate adaptation and mitigation
- Access to parks, trails, and green spaces

**Economic** components, including activities that lead to prosperity.

- Stable, living wage jobs
- High-quality goods and services
- Economic vitality



# How to Get Started with Collaboration

Planners and public health professionals often work toward common goals, but effort may be required to build relationships and overcome professional silos. Follow these recommendations to start collaborating with your professional counterparts.

## Identify

**Find planners in your community by searching online for:** Local planning and development office, zoning administration office, economic development departments, **metropolitan planning organizations**, **housing agencies**, and **universities**.



**Find public health professionals in your community by searching online for:** **City, county, or regional health department, state and territorial health department**, university or school of public health, hospital community health improvement plans, public health commission or coalition, or **public health institute**.

## Learn

Learn about each other's priorities, key activities, and timelines through online research to help find common ground for collaboration.



## Connect

Connect with your professional counterpart at events, meetings, coalitions, and work sessions that your counterparts organize or attend. Follow up via email or phone call.



## Act

Take action in the following ways:

- Share data.
- Participate in steering committees, coalitions, and other groups.
- Engage the public in decision-making.
- Create and evaluate goals and policies.
- Write grants and raise funds.



## Sustain

Continue to engage with your counterparts on a regular basis. Consider actively participating in activities with outcomes, such as plan updates, project developments, advisory committees, community benefits agreements, and other ongoing programs.



### Tip: Effective Communication

Planners and public health officials use profession-specific terms and knowledge. Use plain language, avoid industry-specific jargon, and ask clarifying questions to encourage effective communication. Learn more about relevant terms and concepts by exploring the [Making Healthy Places Glossary](#).

# Public Health

Public health departments focus on various community issues that overlap with planning. Planners can connect with public health professionals over shared interests that aim to improve the built environment and community wellbeing.

## Public health departments:

- Promote health equity, prevent and protect against disease outbreaks and injury, and address issues that intersect with planning practice, including access to healthy food and physical activity opportunities.
- Collect local health data, including existing health disparities.
- Create and implement policies, plans, programs, and laws that impact health.
- Conduct community outreach to advance public health goals.

## Operations

- Public health departments may have state, local (county or municipal), or regional jurisdictions and authority; some may serve multiple jurisdictions.
- Each state, and the District of Columbia, has a **health department**, which is the primary public health authority within the state. See [this resource](#) for more information.
- In **2019**, county-level health departments represented approximately two-thirds of local health departments, while city or town local health departments represented about one-fifth of health departments, and multicounty local health departments represented less than one-tenth of health departments.
- Public health department capacity can vary—larger agencies may have a broad range of functional capacities, while smaller departments may provide a narrow set of public health services.
- Public health departments are responsible for **multiple essential services**, including assessing and monitoring population health status, addressing health problems and hazards, communicating and educating people about health, and supporting community partnerships.



### Tip: CHNAs and CHIPs

**Community Health Needs Assessments (CHNA)** and **Community Health Improvement Plans (CHIP)** can have direct connections to public health and planning activities. These two processes focus on determinants of health and activities to improve community conditions. Check with public health agencies to determine whether they are engaged in these processes.

## Overlapping Topics with Planning



Healthy food



Clean air, water, and soil



Active transportation



Quality housing



Parks, trails, and green spaces

# Planning

Planners often contribute to projects that directly impact community health. Public health professionals can connect with planners over shared interests that aim to improve the built environment and community wellbeing.

## Public planning agencies:

- Create community plans that shape the growth and development of a community and promote implementation with other public agencies.
- Review applications for community projects and private developments and advise elected officials about potential effects on community wellbeing.
- Draft regulations, such as zoning ordinances, that shape the built environment.
- Engage community members to identify and achieve their vision for the future of the community.

## Operations

- Planning agencies may operate at the local (municipal or county) or regional level. Only a few states have state planning agencies. Federal-level programs can provide technical assistance, guidance, and funding to implement planning approaches.
- Municipalities are served by municipal planning agencies and unincorporated areas are served by county agencies.
- Urbanized areas have regional planning agencies such as **Metropolitan Planning Organizations** or **Council of Governments** that focus on metropolitan transportation planning and interlocal issues, including environmental management, land use planning, and economic development.
- Larger communities may have separate planning departments, while smaller communities may combine planning with other functions such as economic development or building services. Some small and rural towns may rely on a county or regional agency for planning support.
- Planning agencies are usually involved in these **five activities**: long-range community visioning and goal setting; plan making; standards, policies, and incentives; development work; and public investments.

## Tip: Community Plans

Plans are one of planners' most visible interventions to support communities. These plans can be comprehensive (long-range plans), focus on a subarea (e.g., neighborhood plans, corridor plans), or serve a specific function (e.g., climate action plans, open and green space plans). Some plans are required to have regular updates, while others are one-time activities. Check with your local planning office to identify relevant planning processes and timelines.



## Overlapping Topics with Public Health



Equitable development



Climate change



Transportation



Community engagement



Housing



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**American Planning Association**

*Creating Great Communities for All*

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