# Planning for a healthy community

Healthy communities

The health and vitality of people and the communities they live in are interdependent. Communities prosper with healthy, resilient people. At the same time, the physical and mental health of each person is strongly influenced by their everyday environments. Conditions in the places where people live, learn, work and play affect a wide range of health risks and health outcomes. These conditions are known as *social determinants of health* (SDOH)[i].
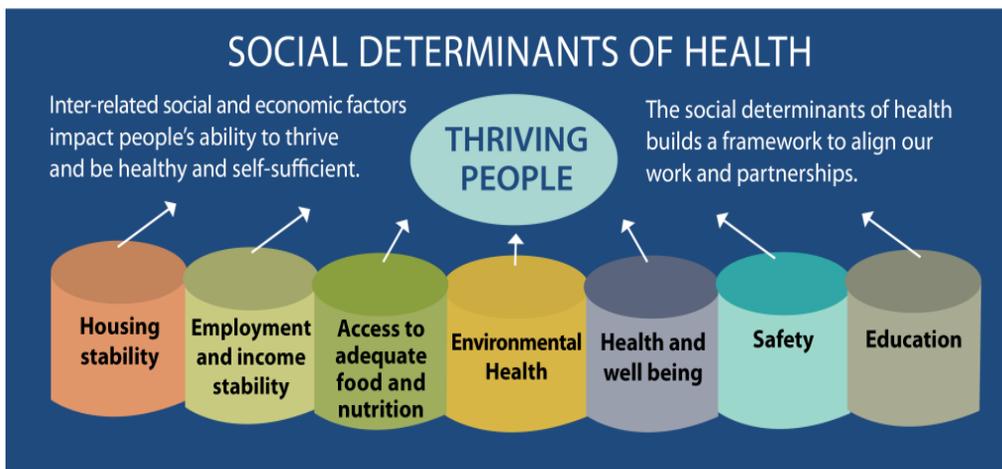
SDOH include things such as: access to social and economic opportunities; the resources and supports available in our homes, neighborhoods and communities; the quality of our schooling; the safety of our neighborhoods and workplaces; the cleanliness of our water, food and air; and the nature of our social interactions and relationships (see figure; content adapted from various sources). These conditions interact to increase or decrease risks and outcomes for major diseases such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and some forms of cancer. The conditions also explain, in part, why some Hennepin County residents are healthier than others, and more generally, why Hennepin County residents overall are not as healthy as they could be.[ii] Many of these conditions are *place-based*, that is, they are affected by the built environment.

Local planning and health

Since the practice of community planning plays a significant role in shaping the built environment, local planning can have real and significant impacts on increasing community health. Planning can also play a role in reducing *health disparities*, which are differences in health that stem from the built and social environment. Planning and designing communities with health in mind, specifically through the local comprehensive plan, can lead to improved community health, wellness, and quality of life for all residents.

Including health in a comprehensive plan

Comprehensive planning involves making decisions around land use, transportation, parks and trails, water resources, economic development, public facilities and other topics. A community's plan can be a powerful tool in shaping growth and development, addressing many SDOH, and ensuring equitable access to resources — therefore supporting the vitality of both the built environment and residents. Taking the steps below can help you get started on addressing health in your local plan.

1. **Review your current comprehensive plan with modern-day health concerns in mind.** This is an important first step. Don't forget to take credit for the work you are already doing! Use a tool such as the [Planning for a Healthy Community Checklist](#).

2. **Be intentional about creating a healthier community in your plan update.** Local planning will affect people's health regardless, so why not avoid adverse effects and take steps to ensure local government plans help improve our health!

3. **Think broadly.** Addressing health in your plan goes beyond adding a public health chapter or section (which is useful for traditional public health topics and specific policies). Health is a larger concept that lies within many topics and can be incorporated throughout the plan — from vision and goals, to background data and collection, to each specific chapter and in implementation measures.

4. **Authentically engage stakeholders in the planning process.** Reach out to community members and offer multiple, convenient and accessible ways for meaningful participation. Consider targeting community engagement to include populations that are experiencing health disparities and areas/topics with the greatest need for services. Include public health professionals in defining priority health issues.

5. **Use data to help make your point and tell the health story.** Use data to tell the story of how community conditions support (or don't support) health today. How does your community rate in key health and livability measures? What are areas for improvement? Who is most at risk? What indicators can you track to measure progress?

Making it your own

There is no one way to include health in a comprehensive plan. Cities are encouraged to use an approach that best meets your needs. If you are looking for a place to start, the [Minnesota Department of Health](#) suggests considering these [eight positive health goals](#).[iii]

- Design healthy housing for all household sizes and incomes
- Provide access to affordable healthy foods
- Reduce exposure to air pollutants, hazardous materials and nuisances
- Increase physical activity
- Increase access to greenery
- Increase safety of pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists
- Increase personal safety and security
- Create climate-resilient communities

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[i] https://www.cdc.gov/socialdeterminants
[ii] https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-of-health
[iii] https://metrocouncil.org/Handbook/PlanIt/Files/Expert-Article-Integrating-Health-into-Comp-Plan.aspx