

# The Plan for a Healthy Los Angeles: A City Dreams Big, Aiming to Make Health Goals and Metrics a Part of its General Plan

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Director of Policy and Innovation, Los Angeles Food Policy Council

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**Claire Bowin,**

Senior City Planner, City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning



**U**rban sprawl. Air pollution. Rising rates of asthma, diabetes and other preventable diseases. Broken sidewalks. Shuttered playgrounds. Gaping disparities in health outcomes between wealthy communities and disadvantaged ones. These are some of the most pressing issues facing our nation’s urban communities, and the City of Los Angeles is no exception. What’s noteworthy about Los Angeles is that the City, with help from the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (Public Health), is working to change these realities by bringing health goals and metrics into the very framework of Los Angeles’ development and planning structure — its General Plan.

For the past two years, stakeholders from the City, the county, and a multitude of community organizations have been developing **The Plan for a Healthy Los Angeles** as both an aspirational statement of the City’s goals, and a detailed planning document that addresses access to open space, supports active

## Key Accomplishments

- Developed the Health Atlas for the City of Los Angeles, providing a data-driven analysis of health outcomes and underlying inequities.
- Involved over 1,000 Angelenos in the development of the Plan for a Healthy Los Angeles through health fairs, workshops, organized bike rides, online surveys, and small group discussions.
- Supported multi-sector collaboration through development of a Technical Advisory Committee and Community Advisory Committee.
- Developed The Plan for a Healthy Los Angeles, a policy document that prioritizes health goals and health-driven programs for LA City.





transportation and prioritizes health equity in community design. If adopted by the Los Angeles City Council, it will become an element of the General Plan, laying a foundation that brings health into the forefront of the City's policies for the benefit of future generations.

## What's the Problem?

Heart disease, stroke, diabetes, cancer, and other chronic diseases are the leading causes of premature death and disability in our society. These conditions account for approximately 80 percent of all healthcare costs. The significant human toll and economic burden of chronic diseases along with injuries and violence have led to a deeper examination of the connections between the social and environmental conditions of communities and the health of residents. This scrutiny has led to a further understanding of the impact that land use, zoning practices and the placement of industrial enterprises, freeways and transit zones have on the health and safety of communities. Planning, in other words, can reinforce social, economic, and health disparities — or planning can help address and reduce them.

Today, residents of southeast Los Angeles and the community of Westlake have less than half an acre of park space for every 1,000 people, and fewer than 10 percent of adults in those neighborhoods eat the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables a day.<sup>1</sup> For many residents, especially in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color, opportunities to be active, to eat healthy foods, and to have easy access to community resources are severely limited.

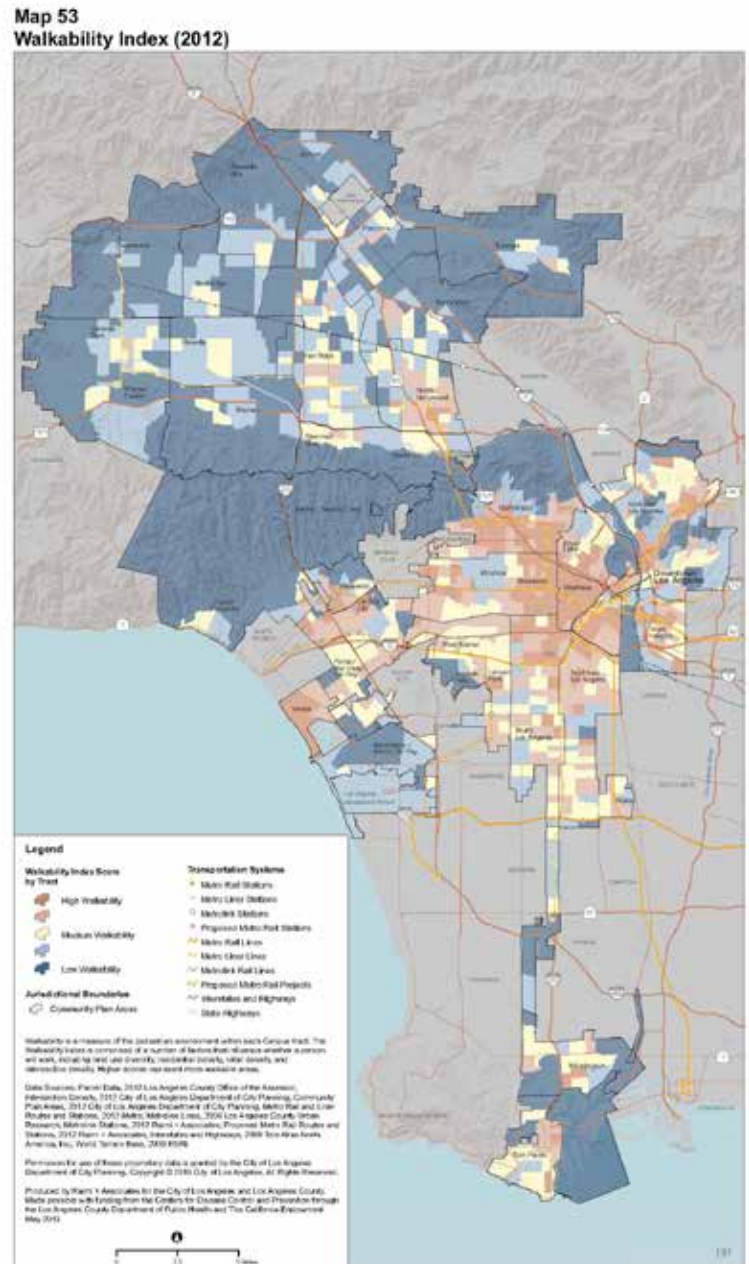
Access to public parks and recreational facilities have been shown to help reduce neighborhood crime, promote physical activity, and enhance mental health. People are more likely to be active if they live within a mile of open space.<sup>2,3,4</sup> Yet only 30 percent of Angelenos live within walking distance of a park.<sup>4</sup> Low-income neighborhoods like south and southeast Los Angeles or Westlake tend to have the least open space while wealthier neighborhoods like Bel-Air, Beverly Crest, Brentwood, and Pacific Palisades have more plentiful open space.

## Why It Matters

The Plan for a Healthy Los Angeles serves as an overarching policy document for health — a platform to help launch broad, citywide initiatives that address health and equity. The Plan’s development provided an opportunity to bring new ideas to the table, lift voices of community members, and develop strategies that help advance the needs and vision of community residents.

The Plan also allows City and county staff to collaborate together and with other departments and community-based organizations, and take on ownership of projects.

“As part of the General Plan, [the Plan for a Healthy Los Angeles is] going to have a huge impact for generations to come,” said Clare Fox, Director of Policy and Innovation for the Los Angeles Food Policy Council. “The fact that there is an entire element dedicated to health is a huge step toward health equity. This is the first time we’ve had an overarching health policy framework that sets the tone for planning and development in the city.”



Accessed the Health Atlas for the City of Los Angeles through <http://healthyplan.la/the-health-profiles/>

## What We're Doing

Policy change begins with data that can be shared with and understood by the public. To increase understanding of health inequities, the City developed the Health Atlas for the City of Los Angeles. It provides a rigorous analysis of health outcomes and underlying health inequities.

“The Health Atlas provided the City with a benchmark of where we are today so we can see how much progress we've made in the future and where we can target limited dollars,” said Claire Bowin, Senior City Planner with the City of Los Angeles. Data from the Atlas and its 114 maps were added to a dynamic website, giving community residents, City staff, and policy leaders an opportunity to visually see the links between community conditions and health.



The City engaged in extensive community outreach with health fairs, workshops, organized bike rides, online surveys, and small group discussions. The outreach effort targeted communities with the poorest health outcomes, and all together, more than 1,000 residents participated. The outreach process brought many critical health challenges to the forefront, and provided an opportunity to recognize new initiatives that are emerging in many neighborhoods.

During the next phase of developing the Plan, the City engaged a Community Advisory Committee, made of representatives from community-based organizations, to identify cross-cutting strategies and provide input on the development of policy and programs. A Technical Advisory Committee comprised of representatives from City and county departments refined the programs and policies to ensure they were action-oriented. “The ‘health-in-all-policies’ emphasis, highlighting the importance of assessing the health impact of policies in all sectors of government, resonated across City departments,” said Bowin. “In Los Angeles, libraries are not just places to check out books,” she said. “They also serve as sites for getting information on healthy foods and healthcare.” In 2014, selected city libraries also participated in Public Health’s flu vaccine clinic outreach. People could check out a book and get a flu shot.

The City released the first public draft of The Plan for a Healthy Los Angeles in March 2013. A 90-day public comment period allowed residents, businesses, and community-based organizations to evaluate goals and policies identified in the Plan.

“The draft Plan for a Healthy Los Angeles was revised and strengthened in response to the public comments,” said Elizabeth Carvajal, Urban Planning and Public Health Specialist, with Raimi and Associates, the consultant on the project. “In particular, some of the comments focused on equity. ... There was an emphasis on having more specific objectives, policies, and programs around active places, food innovation, and safe neighborhoods.” By early 2014, community feedback was incorporated into the revised plan. A new chapter was added detailing the importance of elevating health and equity in all proposed strategies, and a cross-sector, collaborative approach to advance health in planning and policy.

## What's Next

City and county leaders are continuing to learn how to prioritize and strike a balance between the ideas offered during the community engagement process and the limitations in what the City can do. While certain issues are important to community health, such as gun control, they were beyond the scope of the Plan for a Healthy Los Angeles. The Plan's development provided a basis for continued dialogue with key agencies around these areas of interest.

The Plan for a Healthy Los Angeles lays out a practical vision for creating a more vibrant, healthy, and sustainable city. It will be reviewed by the Planning Commission and City Council in late 2014 or early 2015, and if approved, will become part of the City's General Plan. It will be the first health and wellness element of a General Plan in a jurisdiction of this size.

## To learn more about this initiative, contact:

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