

Good Health Counts

A Vision for California



Prepared by:

Prevention Institute
221 Oak Street
Oakland, CA 94607
510.444.7738
www.preventioninstitute.org

The Value of Good Health

Good health is critical to our quality of life, our productivity, and our economy. Yet research indicates that today's generation of children may have shorter life expectancies than their parents, rates of diabetes and childhood asthma are increasing, and medical expenditures are going up rather than down. California has a problem if these trends do not begin to change.

People may know on a personal level what an environment that promotes good health looks like. There are intuitive factors like access to fruits and vegetables, to safe places to exercise, to regular clinical check-ups, and avoiding harmful exposures, among others. Community environments are powerful forces in producing and supporting good health. In order to move toward a new framework for health, we must collectively understand that good health requires

You don't have anything if you don't have your health.



more than health care. In order to curb the onset and severity of illness and injury, prevention must take greater precedence. California spends one in eight dollars on health care, that money is spent primarily after people are hurt or sick. We are expending our money, not investing it. This is harming California's taxpayers, businesses, and government. Although changing how people view and act on issues is not easy, we have seen many such changes over the last generation. And, there is increasing evidence that we will see a return on investment if we increase funding and support for community health by reducing disease burdens, saving dollars, and by increased attendance and productivity. Creating a community health infrastructure is doable.

Good Health Counts, A 21st-Century Approach to Health and Community for California, is a comprehensive report that details why good health is important to the state of California. In today's socio-political landscape there is a critical need to shift thinking

about health and the partners who must be engaged to support and take responsibility for improving the public's health. *Good Health Counts* offers a new vision for community health that refocuses the current debate on how to improve health and can help California achieve that vision.

Good Health Counts pays particular attention to low-income communities and communities of color because they have not had the opportunity to connect to the systems that make a healthy future and a better quality of life possible.

The report was funded by The California Endowment and prepared by Prevention Institute. The Institute reviewed 79 community indicator reports, interviewed 64 people and reviewed 9 popular culture report cards in preparing this report. Overall, *Good Health Counts* consists of two major sections: the first broadens the definition of health to identify why a community health framework is crucial to addressing the root factors that contribute to health; and the second translates findings from research and practice-based knowledge into tangible tools to measure and improve health in a community. As a national leader in innovative strategies, embracing the community health framework will be a step forward for California and a commitment to creating the necessary infrastructure to support health.

It's About Where You Live

What is the environment like where you live? The natural environment and other physical and social conditions, such as poverty, housing quality, job opportunities and violence (to name a few), contribute to poor health outcomes. *Good Health Counts* delineates the critical elements of community health into four major clusters (see **Box 1**):

- Equitable Opportunity Factors – Does everyone have access to opportunities?
- People Factors – Are people connected and engaged?
- Place Factors – Does the community environment support health?
- Medical Services – Do medical services meet the needs of the community?

A healthy community environment and quality medical services are mutually supportive; activities to improve medical services alone must be complemented by work in the other clusters in order to comprehensively improve environments. The environment offers key opportunities to affect the underlying factors that influence health. In order to maximize effectiveness, these environmental change strategies must engage a diverse constituency from a range of disciplines, sectors, and organizations to find, analyze, and address the underlying causes of illnesses and injuries. These four priority community health clusters vary based on the needs of the community. There is a comprehensive set of elements and correlating indicators that can be adopted and modified as any community health agenda progresses.

Putting Community Health at the Center of How We Do Business

Improving community health cannot be achieved by any one organization working in a silo. It requires participation from key public and private institutions working in partnership with communities. Six target groups in particular can and should take leadership and/or accountability roles in improving community health:

- **The healthcare sector** has the preeminent role in delivering quality medical services with cultural competence and has a much broader role in advocating for the necessary elements of community health and prevention.
- **Businesses** have a major influence on community health, and can set expectations, provide incentives, and model their organization's behavior around a vision of healthy communities.
- **Community stakeholders** need to be involved in identifying the health problems and community health elements of highest priority.
- **Government** can affect large numbers of people by changing and enforcing local, state, and federal laws.
- **Public health** can advance awareness and understanding of community health and engage the necessary players.
- **The media** is not just an observer of our culture but also a shaper of it. In choosing what to cover and what not to cover, the media influences the public's understanding about which issues are most important.

Tracking Health: Summary of Research and Findings on Community Indicator Reports

As we strive to ensure community health is at the center of our decisions and priorities we need a way to talk about and assess our progress on building healthy communities. Tools, such as community indicator reports and report cards, are valuable because they provide common language, capture critical elements, concretize priorities, bring parties together, involve different sectors, and can be a draw for the media. Community indicator reports are comprehensive evaluations of wellbeing and use a carefully selected set of indicators to track the social, health, and economic conditions in a defined geographic area. Report cards are created from the highlights of larger reports. The information is simplified by adding grades, rankings or comparisons.

Over the past two decades, community indicators and indicator reports have proliferated in the United States. Community indicator reports continue to evolve in content and style, influenced by the Internet, Internet-based geographic information systems, popular acceptance of indicator measures, and community-relevant data collection. Community indicator reports facilitate community improvement by fostering community engagement and collaboration, improving health care quality, framing accountability and informing policy.

Box 1: Key Community Factors

Equitable Opportunity Factors

1. **Racial justice**, characterized by policies and organizational practices that foster equitable opportunities and services for all; positive relations between people of different races and ethnic backgrounds.
2. **Jobs and local ownership**, characterized by local ownership of assets, including homes and businesses; access to investment opportunities, job availability, the ability to make a living wage.
3. **Education**, characterized by high-quality and available education and literacy development across the life span.

People Factors

1. **Social networks and trust**, characterized by strong social ties among persons and positions, built upon mutual obligations; opportunities to exchange information; the ability to enforce standards and administer sanctions.
2. **Participation and willingness to act for the common good**, characterized by local/indigenous leadership; involvement in community or social organizations; participation in the political process; willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good.
3. **Acceptable behaviors and attitudes**, characterized by regularities in behavior with which people generally conform; standards of behavior that foster disapproval of deviance; the way in which the environment tells people what is okay and not okay.

Place Factors

1. **What's sold and how it's promoted**, characterized by the availability and promotion of safe, healthy, affordable, culturally appropriate products and services (e.g., food, books and school supplies; sports equipment; arts and crafts supplies; and other recreational items); limited promotion and availability, or lack, of potentially harmful products and services (e.g., tobacco, firearms, alcohol and other drugs).
2. **Look, feel and safety**, characterized by a well-maintained, appealing, clean, and culturally relevant visual and auditory environment; actual and perceived safety.
3. **Parks and open space**, characterized by safe, clean, accessible parks; parks that appeal to interests and activities across the life span; green space; outdoor space that is accessible to the community; natural/open space that is preserved through the planning process.
4. **Getting around**, characterized by availability of safe, reliable, accessible and affordable methods for moving people around, including public transit, walking, biking.
5. **Housing**, characterized by safe, affordable, available housing.
6. **Air, water and soil**, characterized by safe and nontoxic water, soil, indoor and outdoor air, and building materials.
7. **Arts and culture**, characterized by abundant opportunities within the community for cultural and artistic expression and participation, and for cultural values to be expressed through the arts.

Medical Services

1. **Preventive services**, characterized by a strong system of primary, preventive health services that are responsive to community needs.
2. **Access**, characterized by a comprehensive system of health coverage that is simple, affordable and available.
3. **Treatment quality, disease management, in-patient services and alternative medicine**, characterized by safe, effective, timely, and appropriate in-patient and out-patient care.
4. **Cultural competence**, characterized by patient-centered care that is understanding of and responsive to different cultures, languages and needs.
5. **Emergency response**, characterized by timely and appropriate responses that stabilize crisis situations and link those in need with appropriate follow-up care.

A Menu for Advancing Community Health in California

Community indicator reports and report cards can be effective tools in improving community health. In its review of reports and interviews with individuals, Prevention Institute gathered and organized elements of effective tools and the necessary process to catalyze change. Indicators can be used as tools to increase understanding about community health and enact change. Suggested tools by target group are below (prototypes for some of these tools are included in the report).

Since the **health care sector** already participates in a number of required measurements and reporting efforts, it should integrate community health elements into existing efforts. These efforts include 1) Community Health Care Needs Assessment, 2) California Hospital Assessment and Reporting Task Force.

For **business**, an annual ranking of the top 100 businesses in California promoting community health could be created and publicized by partnering with the media. Similar to environmentally-friendly business certification programs, community health business certification could be established as well.

For **government**, counties across the state could be ranked based on the percentage of the county budget allocated to key elements of community health. In addition, state policies and ballot propositions could be assessed with community health and key indicators in mind.

Communities could benefit from a tool that defines the elements of community health while enabling community members and leaders to come up with the indicators most important to them.

Public health could use a tool that allows it to engage the major governmental sectors influential in community health. A report card could be developed that grades each of the sectors on their contribution to community health.

Indicator Reports: What Works, When and How?

Elements of an Effective Tool

- Tracks progress and trends
- Actionable
- Establishes accountability
- Asset orientation
- On the whole, captures what is important
- Credibility and trustworthiness
- Meaningful language
- Accessible and user-friendly
- Values-based
- Grounded in a plausible theory of change

Elements of an Effective Process

- A vision for community health
- Focused goals based on key opportunities
- Relationship-based inter-sector collaboration
- Selection of the right indicators for maximum leverage in a given sector
- Establishment of accountability
- A commitment to data source development
- A commitment to ongoing community input
- An appreciation of media coverage

Conclusion

It is critical to remember that tools alone are not enough. They are only shorthand for the values that we put forward as a state that is committed to a future of economic opportunity and vitality where residents live in healthy communities. Where we live and work is a critical factor that determines whether we end up fit and healthy or not. When people do not have access to a healthy environment or opportunities to make healthier choices, it undermines their health and lowers their quality of life. Many communities in our state are struggling because they are not given a fair chance to be healthy. Promoting and maintaining health means addressing community health and public systems such as mass transit, markets with healthy foods, and schools that promote health through good nutrition and physical education requirements. When these structures are in place they make it possible for Californians to maintain their health and quality of life. Without these structures the health of our communities and the prosperity of our state are undermined. California can and should be a leader by implementing effective policies and practices that would make the state healthier.

A Vision for California—10 Principles for Community Health

1. Every Californian will view health as a resource for living.
2. All Californians will have the opportunity to live in healthy communities.
3. Californians will understand the relationship between their community environment and their health.
4. Californians will understand the value of fostering community health as a critical element in sustaining the state's economic power.
5. Planning, redevelopment and transportation decisions will be made with consideration of their health impact.
6. California businesses will foster and promote healthy community environments.
7. All Californians will have affordable health insurance.
8. Californians will be able to access culturally competent, high-quality medical services when needed.
9. Medical providers in California will reflect the race/ethnicity/culture of the communities they serve.
10. Health insurance and medical providers will promote and support healthy community environments.

For more information please contact Program Coordinator, Linnea Ashley, MPH at:
Linnea@preventioninstitute.org or at (510) 444-7738

The full report is available free of cost at:
http://www.preventioninstitute.org/chhd_projects.html

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The California Endowment
1000 North Alameda Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012
800.449.4149
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