

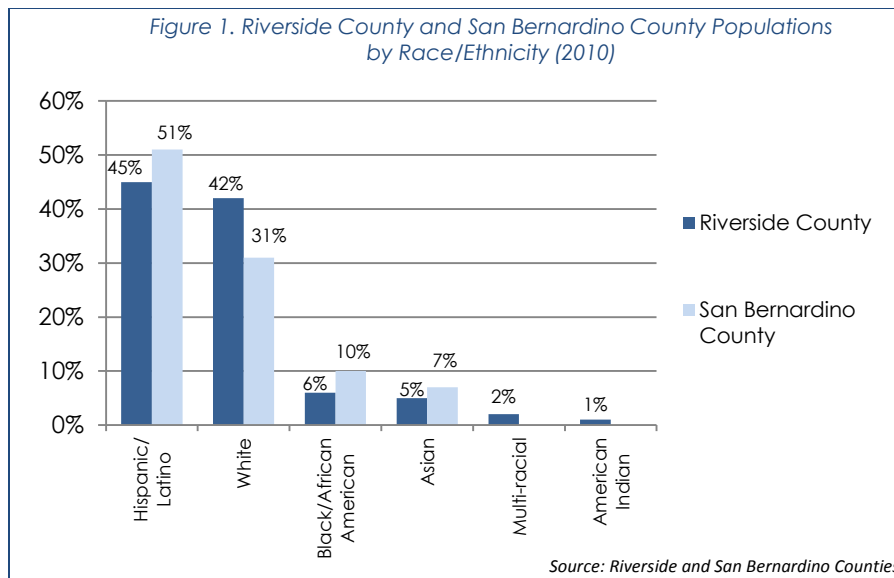
Improving Health Outcomes in the Inland Empire

Profile of a Regional Health Collaborative

For years, Riverside and San Bernardino Counties have worked together to address common issues, but these collaborations have typically been project-based or sporadic in nature. Jurisdictional mandates and limited resources tend to keep local health departments focused solely within their geographic borders, despite the fact that neighboring counties frequently share challenges and opportunities. Leaders from the two counties were eager to change that, and in 2014, building on their participation in the multi-county Public Health Alliance of Southern California, the two Departments of Public Health came together as part of an intentional effort to learn from one another and identify opportunities to work in partnership to advance health in all policies across the Inland Empire region. They focused particularly on what it takes to engage other government sectors with public health and on building on lessons learned in resident engagement. This profile summarizes the process and outcomes of Riverside and San Bernardino Counties' first year of deep regional collaboration to promote health and equity across the Inland Empire.

The Inland Empire: Region of Opportunity

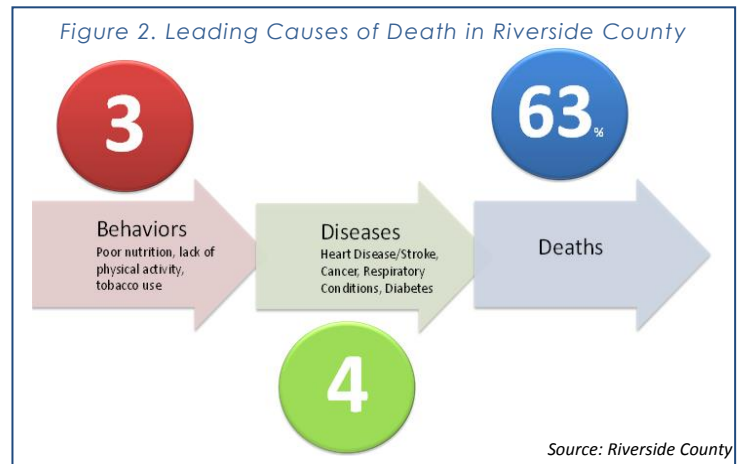
California's Inland Empire region—comprised of Riverside and San Bernardino Counties—is home to more than four million people, and is one of the fastest growing regions in the state.¹ The Inland Empire is the nation's 13th most populous metropolitan area and, stretching across an expanse of 27,000 square miles, the region is geographically larger than ten states.^{2,3} As shown in Figure 1, the Inland Empire's population is richly diverse; two-thirds of residents are non-White, and the proportion of Hispanic/Latino residents is projected to rise in the next decade.⁴



In addition to changing population demographics, regional growth and development are projected to rise. The two County Health Departments are working to ensure that future development is done in such a way that protects and promotes health, particularly among the region's most vulnerable communities. At present, the Inland Empire, like many places, faces chronic disease and safety challenges that disproportionately burden low-income communities and people of color. The "3-4-50" model, popularized by San Diego County, illustrates how three health behaviors are associated with four chronic diseases, which are responsible for 50 percent of all deaths in that county. Riverside County has adapted this model, as shown in Figure 2, to reflect the fact that three behaviors and four diseases account for 63

percent of deaths in Riverside County, demonstrating the Inland Empire’s particular challenges with chronic disease prevention.⁵

The health behaviors associated with these leading causes of death are rooted in community conditions and socioeconomic factors. Inequitable access to opportunities, social norms, and the presence or absence of health-promoting resources in community environments all determine whether people can be healthy and safe *in the first place*. Communities across the Inland Empire struggle with these and other barriers to health. The vast size of San Bernardino County, for example, coupled with large numbers of remote, unincorporated communities, poses substantial challenges to promoting healthy living, ensuring safe and health-promoting environments, and providing access to a full spectrum of health services for all residents. Socioeconomic challenges, such as disparities in school quality, inequities in educational attainment, and a higher than average percentage of residents (one in five) living in under-resourced neighborhoods, create significant challenges to transforming San Bernardino County’s culture to one of health and empowerment for all.



Each county has a Department of Public Health that is responsible for protecting and promoting the health of its residents. Both the Riverside County and San Bernardino County Departments of Public Health recognize the importance of addressing the social determinants of health as imperative for establishing health equity and optimal health.

"Inland Empire residents in both counties face many of the same core health issues and inequities. It makes sense to work and learn together."

– Susan Harrington, Director of Public Health, Riverside County, California

Advancing Regional Collaboration

Each county has made great strides in elevating health issues to the highest level of county government, and now sees an opportunity to work across county lines to achieve more as a region. This makes a great deal of sense. Despite a 200-mile border separating the two counties, the distinction between the counties is in many ways invisible. Jobs, housing, and health care are distributed in such a way that many residents live in one county and work in the other, or seek health care in one county and go to work in the other. People experience Riverside and San Bernardino Counties as a region. Additionally, many of the factors that contribute to preventable illnesses and injuries in the region—such as the way streets and highways are designed—cross the county line. In 2014, both counties were in the process of developing their Community Health Assessments and Community Health Improvement Plans as part of the national public health accreditation process, and were eager to take a collaborative approach to explore shared opportunities and challenges.

- ❖ San Bernardino County has used its [Community Vital Signs Initiative](#) to engage residents in a countywide visioning and priority-setting process. During the summer of 2013, the County conducted 23 community engagement meetings. Over 1,000 community members—a mixture of professionals, community leaders, and residents—reviewed data on a broad range of topics and identified the most urgent issues impacting the health and wellness of County residents. Community members elevated seven priority areas for action. The County then reconvened over 1,200 community stakeholders—representing healthcare, education, public safety, the business sector, planning and transportation, faith-based and community-based organizations, local jurisdictions, policymakers, and residents—to develop a Community Transformation Plan that includes collective goals, indicators to measure success, and potential cross-cutting strategies and policy recommendations.

- ❖ Similarly, through its [SHAPE \(Strategic Health Alliance Pursuing Equity\) Riverside County initiative](#), Riverside County has engaged a broad array of community stakeholders. The Department of Public Health surveyed more than 4,000 residents and hosted community forums throughout the county in early 2015 to identify people’s health-related priorities. Residents elevated issues such as air quality, drug abuse, obesity, jobs/economy, homelessness, and safe neighborhoods as top concerns. In July 2015, the County hosted a workshop with 150 participants representing a range of sectors, where stakeholders reviewed the findings of the countywide survey and prioritized focus areas to guide the health department’s work moving forward. The ideas and strategies generated will shape Riverside County’s forthcoming Community Health Improvement Plan. In Fall 2015, the County will also unveil its Healthy Community Indicators portal, which will allow the public to obtain health data, create customizable reports, and demonstrate progress through a user-friendly website.

In addition to accreditation, a number of factors are contributing to a great sense of opportunity and need in the Inland Empire. The region’s health system has many assets such as reputable health care and academic institutions and a strong and growing cadre of effective, locally based organizations, including those building youth leadership capacity. With an awareness of the broader landscape—such as implementation of the Affordable Care Act and development of a new long-range Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy—the two-county collaborative aims to draw upon local strengths, support greater community engagement, and serve as a statewide and national model for innovative community health partnerships that include health care, city and regional planning, transportation, education, and housing agencies.

Box 1. Regionalism across Southern California

Riverside and San Bernardino Counties are active members of the [Public Health Alliance of Southern California](#), a robust collaborative of nine local health departments working to improve population health and equity across Southern California.⁶ The Alliance was formed in 2011 with the recognition that health issues of regional significance could not be addressed as effectively one county at a time. The group focuses on issues that contribute to high rates of chronic disease, cross county boundaries, and are beyond the scope of any one health department acting alone. The Alliance currently works to promote regional data coordination, healthy regional transportation and food systems, and public health leadership on the state’s water crisis, all through a focus on multi-sector policy, systems, and environmental change.⁷

Through the Alliance, Riverside County and San Bernardino County have worked in partnership to promote health across the vast Southern California region. Recognizing that the Inland Empire has its own unique opportunities and challenges—related to state resources, regional growth, economic development, politics, and more—the two counties saw great promise in coming together to enhance the ways they work in partnership to improve health outcomes in the Inland Empire region.

Developing a Health in All Policies Regional Learning Community

In 2014, with support from The California Endowment, staff of the Riverside County and San Bernardino County Departments of Public Health came together as a “Health in All Policies Learning Community.” [Prevention Institute](#)—a national nonprofit center that advances policies, practices, and collaborative efforts to improve community health, safety, and equity—was selected to provide technical assistance and facilitate the Learning Community. The purpose of the Learning Community was to create a forum for leadership of the two counties’ health departments to learn from one another, to identify opportunities to work in partnership, and ultimately to more effectively advance health in all policies across the Inland Empire region. “Health in All Policies” is an approach to proactively incorporate health and safety considerations into public policy and decision-making.



“Health in All Policies is based on the recognition that our greatest health challenges—for example, chronic illness, health inequities, climate change, and spiraling health care costs—are highly complex and often linked. Promoting healthy communities requires that we address the social determinants of health, such as transportation, education, access to healthy food, economic opportunities, and more. This requires innovative solutions, a new policy paradigm, and structures that break down the siloed nature of government to advance collaboration.”

–Public Health Institute, the California Department of Public Health, and the American Public Health Association⁸

For Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, this approach is a culmination of more than a decade of efforts to promote community health through multi-sector partnerships within their own counties. Each county:

- ❖ Has crafted a long term countywide vision that affirms health as a major priority, under the leadership of a supportive Chief Executive Officer (CEO).
- ❖ Has buy-in from its Board of Supervisors to pursue an integrated, regional approach on key topics: health care, public safety realignment (in compliance with California’s Assembly Bill 109), the Ontario International Airport, and other areas for further collaboration. Each Board designated several members to work with the County CEOs to develop an action plan for regional collaboration and, given the support of the CEOs, it is possible that prevention and the Health in All Policies approach may be integrated into this regional agenda over time.
- ❖ Is in the process of being accredited by the Public Health Accreditation Board, which includes creating a comprehensive countywide Community Health Assessment (CHA) and Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP): [San Bernardino County’s CHA and CHIP](#) and [Riverside County’s CHA and CHIP](#).
- ❖ Has a countywide group that convenes quarterly, bringing together partners across sectors to create healthy policies, systems, and community environments: [San Bernardino County Healthy Communities](#), established in 2006, and the [Riverside County Health Coalition](#), founded in 2008.
- ❖ Works with local cities to support a myriad of “healthy city” initiatives, including adopting general plan health and wellness elements and healthy city resolutions.
- ❖ Is home to reputable academic and health care institutions, and youth- and community-serving organizations that create a robust local public health system.

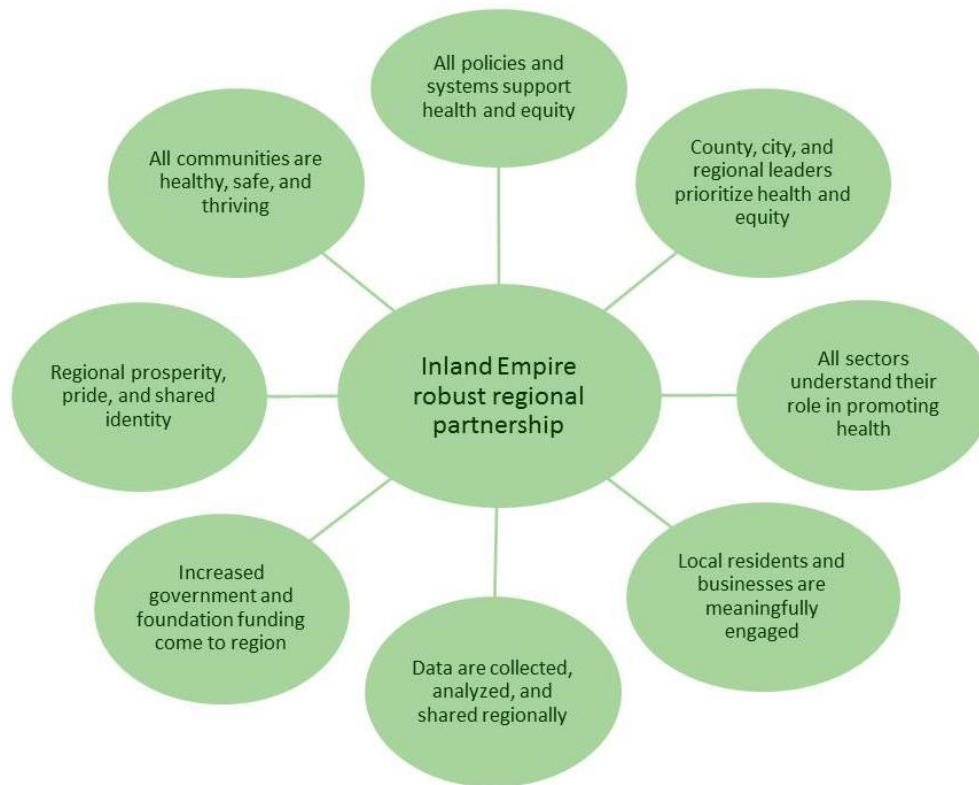
Through these and other efforts, such as Riverside County’s partnership with Building Healthy Communities Eastern Coachella Valley (see Box 2), the two counties have built readiness for shared regional action. At an early meeting of the Learning Community, Dr. Linda Rudolph, Co-Director of the Climate Change and Public Health Project at Public Health Institute (former deputy director of the California Department of Public Health’s Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Public Health, and former chair of the Strategic Growth Council’s Health in All Policies Task Force), provided technical expertise on advancing health in all policies, both regionally and statewide. Based upon this foundation of work and resources, and with technical assistance from Prevention Institute, the Learning Community crafted a working framework for regional collaboration and forged a vision for joint success (see Figure 3).

Box 2. Building Healthy Communities Eastern Coachella Valley

Riverside County partners with Building Healthy Communities Eastern Coachella Valley to share expertise regarding best practices on healthy land use and active transportation. Through funding from The California Endowment, Riverside County Department of Public Health has implemented the Land Use Planning Awareness (LUPA) initiative. LUPA is a high school based community capacity building project designed to empower students across the Eastern Coachella Valley to participate in local planning processes. In 2015, LUPA was honored with the American Planning Association California chapter’s award for excellence in community outreach.



Figure 3. The Inland Empire Health in All Policies Learning Community's Working Framework for Regional Collaboration



Key Accomplishments, 2014-2015

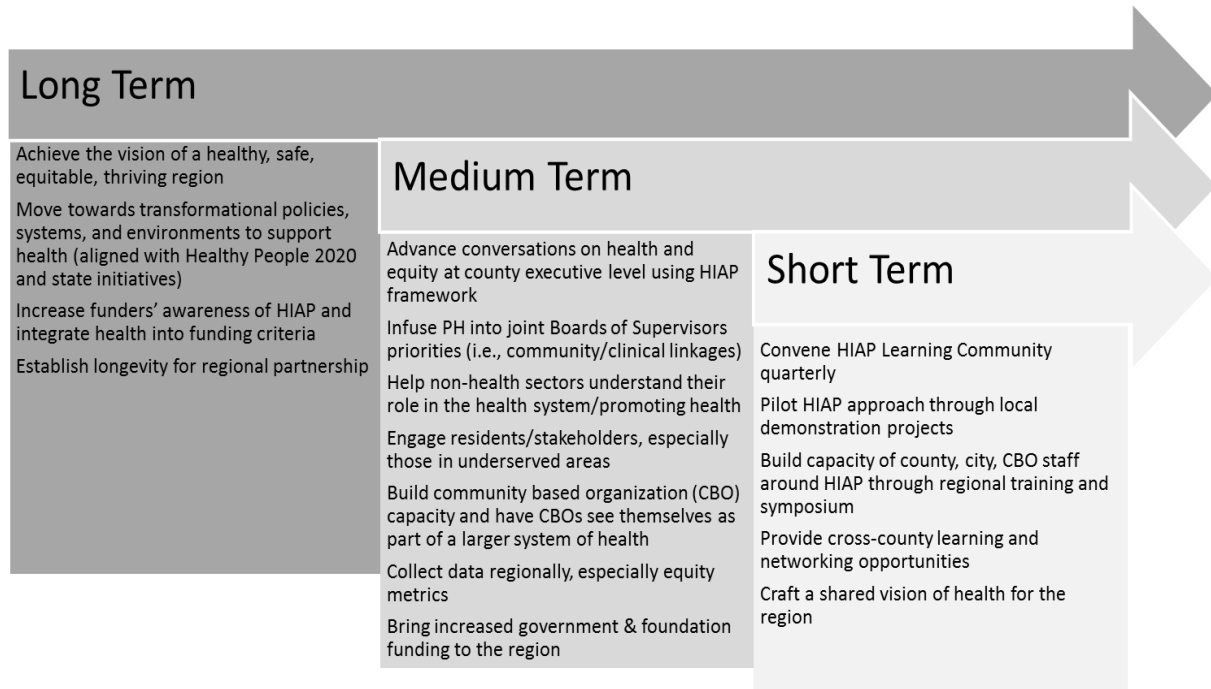
Building Cross-County Collaboration

In its first year (2014-2015), the Inland Empire Health in All Policies Learning Community met quarterly to share ideas and approaches to improve population health outcomes and enhance efficiency in regional governance. As a technical assistance provider and facilitator, Prevention Institute assessed each county's needs and assets related to promoting health in all policies, and helped identify opportunities for regional collaboration. Prevention Institute facilitated an ongoing dialogue and strategic visioning process with the Learning Community, asking questions such as:

- What do you see as priority areas where a regional approach would be more effective than a single county approach to improving health and safety outcomes for the region's low income residents of color?
- How can you support one another's current health improvement efforts?
- What political challenges and opportunities to health equity are on the current landscape?
- Outside of the health department, who within local government and communities are champions for health and prevention?
- What specifically should you ask city, county, and regional leaders to do in order to embed health in all policies?
- What are some short term goals you can achieve to can build a sense of shared accomplishment?
- How can you begin to seed longer-term, transformational change in the region?
- Are there existing policies within the two counties that require stronger implementation in order to protect and promote health?
- What additional sectors should you partner with?
- How will you measure and evaluate your shared efforts?

Through an ongoing facilitated dialogue, the Learning Community identified long, medium, and short term goals for regional collaboration, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Priorities to Advance Health in All Policies (HIAP) in the Inland Empire Region



Local Demonstration Projects: Developing Partnerships across Sectors

With support from The California Endowment, each county piloted the Health in All Policies approach through a local demonstration project designed to build multi-sector partnerships.

- ❖ San Bernardino County focused on the Countywide Vision’s goal of partnering with all sectors of the community to support the success of every child from cradle to career. Through its local demonstration project, the health department was able to begin deeply engaging with the housing and education sectors. The Departments of Public Health, Community Development and Housing, Preschool Services, and the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools collaborated to help affordable housing residents attain appropriate reading levels by the third grade, learn how to enhance their nutrition and increase physical activity, and improve social readiness and safety skills during middle school. The County selected three sites based on the developer’s presence in both Riverside and San Bernardino Counties and their use of well-established resident services programs. The project aimed to demonstrate the benefit of introducing policy that will enable similar training programs in affordable housing developments throughout San Bernardino and Riverside counties—an early step in a process that is envisioned to be much greater over time, and one that can lead to replication of promising practices throughout the region. County representatives from the housing and education sectors attended a Learning Community meeting, demonstrating buy-in for cross-sector and regional partnership, and articulated the value of using health data to make the case for community improvements.
- ❖ In Riverside County, the Department of Public Health collaborated with partners and local cities to institutionalize the Health in All Policies approach across the county. This built upon years of work to develop relationships with the development/planning communities—one of the key sectors whose decisions influence health and safety, and in which the health sector is increasingly having an impact. The Inland Empire is projected to grow in the coming years, and the health department is thinking ahead about how it can influence regional development in a way that protects and promotes health and equity. The health department guided the City of

Coachella’s general plan’s community health and wellness element, which has earned recognition from the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG). Also, in partnership with SCAG, the health department conducted the Health Impact Assessment for the proposed Coachella Valley Link (CV Link) project, a 50-mile alternative transportation corridor for pedestrians, bicyclists, and low speed electric vehicles that will connect communities across the Coachella Valley.⁹ The explicit consideration of health impacts in the CV Link planning process and the fact that the Department of Public Health played a primary role in this effort demonstrate that the transportation sector, like the planning/development sector, is adopting the Health in All Policies approach.

“Partnering with Riverside County in this Learning Community has been a great opportunity to promote health equity in the Inland Empire and introduce Health in All Policies to other sectors.”

– Ken Johnston, Chief Integrity and Compliance Officer, Department of Public Health, San Bernardino County, California

Capacity Building through Regional Convenings

One of the aims of the Learning Community was to foster greater regional collaboration, not just at the county level but at the community level. To do this, the counties held two major convenings in 2015: the first-ever *Inland Empire Healthy Cities Symposium: Promoting Data to Action in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties*, cohosted by Loma Linda University, and *Sustaining Community Prevention in the Inland Empire: Opportunities for Regional and Youth Convergence*, cohosted by Prevention Institute with support from The California Endowment’s Health Exchange Academy. These events engaged over 200 people, including county and city staff, public health and planning practitioners, health care professionals, and community activists. The convenings showcased local work and resources, and provided a forum for cross-sector, cross-county learning and networking.



150 practitioners and leaders from across the region participated in the first-ever Inland Empire Healthy Cities Symposium, Loma Linda, CA, April 2015

Looking Ahead

Cross-county partnerships, like the Inland Empire Health in All Policies Learning Community, are emerging as an important strategy for coordinating and leveraging local resources to achieve shared objectives. The Learning Community gave the Riverside County and San Bernardino County Departments of Public Health a venue to come together and strategize about how to collectively address issues that transcend county borders. Moving forward, the aim is that Riverside and San Bernardino Counties’ work together will continue to evolve toward consistent collaboration on issues where a two-county perspective will ensure better outcomes for residents. One of the lessons from the past year has been just how important it is to have dedicated staff time and facilitation to foster regional dialogue. Each county is complex and dealing with its own pressing health and safety issues, so having a group tasked with helping maintain momentum and accountability between regional meetings turned out to be critical. Ideally, all of the efforts to build capacity for regional collaboration will position the two counties to have greater input into the decision-making of key institutions that also share an interest in the region’s future. Further, with the increasing importance of major issues like regional data sharing, reduction of vehicle miles travelled, and jobs-housing balance, the hope is that this regional approach will also increase bi-county chances for attracting resources that will advance implementation of shared regional strategies.

The foundation laid by the Learning Community is particularly promising given the direction from the two County Boards of Supervisors to explore integrated approaches to regional issues. The deepening of this partnership also comes at an important time in the development of the Accountable Communities for Health concept, which the Inland Empire counties are exploring. An Accountable Community for Health is an important tool to advance health in all policies, as it brings together a “multi-sector alliance of the major health care systems, providers, and health plans, along with public health, key community and social services organizations, schools, and other partners serving a particular geographic area...[that is] responsible for improving the health of the entire community” with a particular focus on achieving health equity.⁷ Through the Learning Community, Riverside and San Bernardino Counties have developed and strengthened their partnership, leadership, and data capacities—competencies that lay the groundwork to potentially establish a regional Accountable Community for Health in the coming years. Additional future plans include continuing to develop each county’s “healthy cities” network, ongoing sharing of best practices and lessons learned, and developing and implementing health equity metrics to demonstrate the impacts of health-promoting land use and transportation initiatives in the region.

“There is a 200-mile-long invisible border that in some ways prevents us from working together, but we’ve learned that does not have to be the case. We have collaborated to solve health issues whenever and wherever possible and have learned from each other.”

– Michael Osur, Deputy Director of Public Health, Riverside County, California

At this stage, the Inland Empire Health in All Policies Learning Community has solidified the sense that the counties have an inevitably linked future. At the city level, a strong and growing “healthy cities” network is creating policies, systems, and environments designed to keep people healthy and safe *in the first place* and protect the region’s most vulnerable communities. At the county level, the Departments of Public Health have an opportunity to support and guide these local efforts, while elevating the Inland Empire as an example within the Public Health Alliance of Southern California and in statewide forums. Together, Riverside and San Bernardino Counties can address issues of regional significance more effectively than either could on its own. This recognition has helped the two Departments of Public Health maintain the resolve to collaborate, and encourage and support collaboration among other county departments to elevate health in all policies throughout the region. In just its first year, the Learning Community has already sparked excitement and a sense of possibility in the region. Looking ahead, this collaborative has the potential to transform the Inland Empire and serve as a model for other counties similarly interested in promoting health, safety, and equity on a regional scale.

References

- ¹ Keller C. (2014). Inland Empire population shows gains since 2010 census. Southern California Public Radio. <http://www.scpur.org/news/2014/05/21/44309/inland-empire-population-shows-gains-since-2010-ce>.
- ² California State University, San Bernardino. (2015). Our region. <http://www.csusb.edu/communityvisitors/ourRegion.html>.
- ³ U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division. (2015). Annual estimates of the resident population: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2014. <http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>.
- ⁴ Riverside County Department of Public Health and San Bernardino County Department of Public Health. (2015).
- ⁵ Riverside County Department of Public Health. (2015).
- ⁶ Public Health Alliance of Southern California. (2015). <http://phasocal.org>.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸ Rudolph L, Caplan J, Ben-Moshe K, & Dillon L. (2013). Health in all policies: A guide for state and local governments. Washington, DC and Oakland, CA: American Public Health Association and Public Health Institute. <http://www.phi.org/resources/?resource=hiapgguide>.
- ⁹ Coachella Valley Link. (2015). <http://www.coachellavalleylink.com>.
- ¹⁰ California State Healthcare Innovation Plan Accountable Communities for Health Work Group. (2015). Recommendations for the California State Healthcare Innovation Plan Accountable Communities for Health initiative. <http://www.chhs.ca.gov/PRI/ACH%20Work%20Group%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>.

