

When Planning meets Health: Delaware's Plan4Health Grant Fosters a Healthy Delaware

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How do we integrate health in land use and community planning? The Delaware Chapter of the American Planning Association (DE APA) and the Delaware Public Health Association (DPHA) came together to pursue the Plan4Health grant through a partnership of the American Planning Association (APA) and the American Public Health Association (APHA) Plan4Health program, which is funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

What is Plan4Health?

The Plan4Health program aims to combat two determinants of chronic disease—lack of physical activity and lack of access to nutritious foods, and to work with local coalitions to promote the inclusion of health in non-traditional sectors. By connecting communities across the country and funding work at the intersection of planning and public health, coalitions can work together to create healthy places for their community. Coalitions, in turn, work within the communities to increase access to healthy food or increase opportunities for active living where residents live, work, and play.

How Delaware was Awarded

Leveraging the Delaware Coalition for Healthy Eating and Active Living, the DE APA and DPHA decided to target Kent County. Although Kent County is the least populated of the three counties, it has the highest rate of obesity within the State,

according to County Health Rankings. The obesity rate in Delaware has doubled since 1990 and children in Kent County are the most overweight. Additionally, Kent County contains multiple food deserts and has the fewest miles of off-road trails in Delaware. Kent County residents also engage in regular physical activity much less often than residents in other Delaware counties. In reviewing Kent County disparities as a function of race/ethnicity, Black males have the highest rate of heart disease deaths (256.4 five-year age-adjusted rate 2005-2009) followed by White males (235.0), black females (182.1), and white females (148.2). According to Nemours Health and Prevention Services, not only are children from Kent County the most overweight in the state, but African-American children have the lowest rates of meeting the daily recommended five servings of fruit and vegetables and the recommended amount of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical

activity per day, which are less than any other race in the county.

It is these disparities among race/ethnicity and geographic location that served as the catalyst to forge a concerted effort in improving health in Kent County. As a result, the Delaware Coalition for Healthy Eating and Active Living (DE HEAL), along with its partners, have channeled efforts to address equitable strategies to improve opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity.

Delaware's Plan4Health Project

The Delaware Plan4Health Team includes representation from the planning and public health communities who are also members of the Delaware Coalition for Healthy Eating and Active Living (DE HEAL). This team decided to leverage the timing of the scheduled comprehensive plan updates for the city of Dover and Kent County to integrate health and equity and improve opportunities for healthy eating and active living through the built environment.

A comprehensive plan is a formal document that presents a vision of what a community aspires to be. Comprehensive plans are used as tools for planners to guide their decision-making about the built and natural environment in a community. Traditionally, these plans are intended to inform decisions around land development and growth; however, as issues involving health and its impact on community

sustainability have increased, so too has the need to address them head on in planning decisions. A comprehensive plan can be a vehicle to do just that, linking concepts in traditional planning (land use, open space, transportation, and housing) with health (physical activity, healthy eating, pollution, and safety). However, addressing health is one factor, but as important is the addressing health through the lens of equity.

Through this grant, the Delaware Plan4Health Team is creating a model to address health and equity through planning. In addition, this model will address:

- Opportunities for physical activity by increasing access to parks and recreation facilities and improving sidewalk/bicycle connectivity and infrastructure through community design/planning/policy;
- Opportunities for healthy eating by increasing accessibility, affordability and availability of healthy foods through community design/planning/policy; and
- Improved land use patterns and urban design to facilitate the above.

Understanding and Health and Equity Priorities in Kent County and Dover

During the course of the grant, The Delaware Plan4Health team sought to better understand specific health and equity needs for the communities as it relates to healthy eating and active living. This included a community survey identifying needs related to increasing healthy food availability and accessibility and physical activity opportunities such as walkable neighborhoods and park access. In addition to the community survey, the Delaware Plan4Health conducted a health and equity analysis to identify equity priority areas as it relates to healthy food access, walkability, bikability, and parks and open space. These data were then used to create a map of priority areas for more targeted interventions. In addition, the Delaware Plan4Health team chapter led efforts in public and stakeholder engagement through two 3-day planning charrettes. Each charrette was conducted in areas identified as an equity priority area, one in downtown Dover and one in a rural area of Kent County. A charrette is planning and design term that brings together planners and other stakeholders for an intense work session of brainstorming ideas and crafting

strategies to address community needs. The charrettes involved local city and county planners, landscape architect consultant and representation from local schools, public health, and community-based organizations.

Results from the charrette and health and equity analysis findings contributed to the framework for planning, policy and programmatic recommendations to increase the affordability and availability for healthy foods and efforts to enhance transit options, parks and open space, and walkable and bikable infrastructure.

In addition to these recommendations, the Delaware Plan4Health team applied a tool to assess how health and equity are addressed in the current comprehensive plans for City of Dover and Kent County. The Comprehensive Plan Score Card was created through partners from Nemours Health and Prevention Services. This score card allowed the Delaware Plan4Health Team to recognize areas in the comprehensive plans to improve the health link with planning decisions.

This process includes carrying out a planning charrette by bringing together the public and disciplines in planning, design and public health for an intensive session of exploring opportunities linking health and planning, with a focus on equity. With the preliminary analyses and results from the charrette, the Delaware Plan4Health team will have a framework and guidance in incorporating health and equity to the comprehensive plan updates for the City of Dover and Kent County.

Expected and Anticipated Outcomes

By bringing together public health and planning, the Delaware Plan4Health team hopes to foster a culture of health in planning and policy decisions. The Plan4Health grant will provide the City of Dover and Kent County planners and officials with guidance document of specific language integrating health and equity to include in the chapters of the comprehensive plan updates, as well as a examples of best practices and polices related to affordable healthy food access, walkability and bikability support and infrastructures, and uses of open space for healthy eating and active living.

In addition to the guidance documents for comprehensive plans, the Delaware

Plan4Health team prepared health and equity analysis of the regional pedestrian and bicycle plans. During the charrette, the team created conceptual plans for a bicycle network in Kent County that connects local towns and areas for healthy food, and for downtown Dover connected residential areas with parks, public spaces and healthy food retail. These plans are currently being considered by the Dover/Kent Regional Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for funding prioritization with the Delaware Department of Transportation.

Although recommendations identified through this grant will be incorporated into the comprehensive plan updates, implementation will require further funding. The Delaware Plan4Health team will be pursuing funding opportunities. While funding is pending for specific strategies, the Plan4Health will develop toolkits specific for Delaware to implement efforts for affordable healthy food access and active living initiatives. These toolkits will be geared toward Delaware organizations and agencies to implement once funding becomes available.

The Delaware Plan4Health Team anticipates health and equity being integrated in planning as an institutional change in future planning and policy decisions. The culture of health allows health being considered in decision-making, even by non-traditional health partners, such as planning, transportation and economic development. The Plan4Health project has been a catalyst to this thinking and is laying the groundwork for supporting a healthy Delaware.

Delaware Plan4Health Team

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