



Improving Health Outcomes for All through Local Policymaking

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What do your Planning, Engineering, Economic Development, Senior Services, and Finance Departments have in common? They can all have a significant impact on the health and well-being of your community’s residents.

Traditional healthcare models tell us that health outcomes are largely dependent on access to healthcare and personal behavior, but emerging research shows they are heavily influenced by the distribution of money, power, and resources (*see the County Health Rankings Model on page 4*) in a community. The conditions in which people are born, grow up, live, work, and socialize are called the social determinants of health.

Local governments have the opportunity to directly influence many of the determinants of health through their management of parks and recreational spaces, enforcement of building codes, maintenance of public streets and sidewalks, and more. But even where there is political will to take a comprehensive approach to improve health, local governments often face barriers in staff time, capacity, and coordination.

That’s where the Legacy Community Alliance for Health comes in. The Alliance aims to remove barriers to comprehensive local action on health. Funded by a grant from the UW School of Medicine and Public Health, the Legacy Community Alliance for Health is a community-academic partnership to build capacity of municipal staff in Wisconsin to address health and health equity through their work in Wisconsin communities. The project offers opportunities for municipal staff in cities that are members of the Green Tier Legacy Community Network to learn best practices and access training and technical assistance resources from UW-Madison, UW Extension, and other experts from around the state.



Staff from Appleton, Sheboygan, and Port Washington participate in a Health in All Policies training in Sheboygan.

The Legacy Community Alliance for Health is a project that aims to reduce health disparities in Wisconsin communities by giving municipal staff opportunities to learn about and apply evidence-based tools to improve health and health equity.

When communities participate in the Legacy Community Alliance for Health, the first step is for staff from a broad range of departments in each municipality to attend a day-long training and workshop on Health in All Policies – a collaborative approach to improving health by incorporating health considerations into decision-making processes. Training attendees have come from city, village, and town departments such as Planning, Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Streets, Engineering, and Library or Senior Services. Partners from traditional Public Health – often at the county but occasionally at the city – are encouraged to participate alongside their non-traditional “health” colleagues. The training introduces key concepts on the social determinants of health and discusses the many ways in which their day-to-day jobs impact health in their communities. It then encourages them to discuss the barriers to health and health equity in their own communities amongst themselves, incorporating a range of perspectives that often get lost in the siloing of local governments into departments.

After the training, staff return to their roles with increased connections to staff in other departments, and greater

Academic Partners

- Applied Population Laboratory
- COWS
- Global Health Institute
- Institute for Research on Poverty
- Morgridge Center for Public Service
- Nelson Institute
- Population Health Institute
- UW-Extension
- Urban and Regional Planning

knowledge about how their jobs impact health and equity in their communities. Academic partners then work with staff in each municipality to define a local project to which they can apply a health and equity lens.

These projects vary widely from community to community based on local priorities, interests, and needs. In Appleton, the project supported city staff in the creation and passage of a “Health in All Policies Ordinance” to help direct local attention and resources to making potential health outcomes of policy part of the conversation going forward (see article on page 4 for more information). In the city of Bayfield, the project is working with the city’s Planning Commission to add health and equity language into its Comprehensive Plan update, a plan that will help guide the city’s actions for years to come. Staff in Fitchburg have created a Health in All Policies Staff Working Group and secured additional funding for its work, which will focus on crucial health equity issues in its neighborhoods. And in Monona, city staff are using the partnership resources to pursue transportation projects and initiatives that will make their most vulnerable populations

Municipalities and Counties Participating in the Legacy Community Alliance for Health



safer when walking and biking. These are just a few examples of how this project is making a difference in Wisconsin communities, and many of the participating communities are still working to identify the right project for their needs.

To learn more about the project, please visit <https://www.cows.org/health-in-all-policies>

About the author:

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primarily on issues related to energy, transportation, and health. Based at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, COWS is a national think-and-do tank that promotes “high road” solutions to social problems. These treat shared growth and opportunity, environmental sustainability, and resilient democratic institutions as necessary and achievable complements in human development. COWS is nonpartisan, but values-based. We seek a world of equal opportunity and security for all. Contact Katya at knszabados@cows.org

The Green Tier Legacy Community network helps communities in Wisconsin learn about, act on, and promote their work related to sustainability initiatives through peer learning and technical assistance. Members of the network include cities, villages, and counties in Wisconsin. Members make a commitment to work with the network toward a set of sustainability goals, measure baseline information to track their successes, and participate in a learning network with their peers. This health project grew out of an interest among the network to better incorporate health and healthy planning into the things they track, discuss, and work on. Find more information at www.greentiercommunities.org

Green Tier Partners

- 1000 Friends of WI
- COWS (Center on Wisconsin Strategy)
- League of WI Municipalities
- Municipal Environmental Group - Wastewater
- WI Counties Association
- WI Department of Natural Resources
- WI Energy Conservation Corp.