Collaboration of Public Health and Urban Development Sectors as a Key Element of Developing Sustainable Systems

Shiriki Kumanyika, PhD, MPH
Senior Advisor
Center for Public Health Initiatives
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA
Triangulation of two themes

- Public health and urban development are part of the same equation—and that neither can afford to ignore each other.

- It is impossible to ignore the environment and the ecological footprint created by the combination of the environments we create and the way that people live in these environments.
The mission of public health is to fulfill “society’s interest in assuring conditions in which persons can be healthy.”

- Preventing epidemics and the spread of disease
- Protecting against environmental hazards
- Preventing injuries
- Encouraging healthy behavior
- Helping communities to recover from disasters
- Ensuring the quality and accessibility of health services
Urban Development

- The process of building cities and other places for people to live.
  - Land use planning and transport planning to improve the built and social environments of communities
  - Creating communities that are economically, socially, and politically viable
“Social and Physical Determinants” Approach in Healthy People 2020

- “Social and physical environmental determinants of health can be defined as:
  - conditions in the social, physical, and economic environment in which people are born, live, work, and age, including access to health care.
  - policies, programs, and institutions and other aspects of the social structure, including the government and private sectors, as well as community factors.

The burden of persuasion...

- HP 2020 must compel its users to examine their role in addressing determinants of health that lie outside the traditional purview of public health.
- Many agencies do not have a mandate with respect to cross-cutting issues.
- Issues like education, housing, agriculture, transportation, and urban development are addressed by other (not health) sectors and agencies.
- Public health must point out policies and activities that, when implemented in other sectors, can help to improve health and achieve health equity.
Links between public health and urban development

- **Active Living**
  - Increasing available recreational space and walkability within communities

- **Healthy Neighborhoods (general)**
  - “Development that segregates land uses, income, and age groups may result in social and physical isolation of vulnerable populations, particularly low-income minorities and the elderly. This often leads to a lack of access to jobs, affordable healthy foods and other needed services.
  - Populations living in areas of concentrated poverty suffer disproportionately from virtually all health impacts
  - Asthma mortality rates are three times higher among African-Americans, who also are more likely to live in areas in violation of federal air standards.”
Links…

- **Healthy Eating**
  - Increasing access to healthy food outlets, such as supermarkets and farmers markets, and facilitating the zoning of corner stores applying for fresh food permits may lead to an increase in healthy eating habits

- **Violence**
  - *Discouraging the presence of off-premise alcohol outlets through zoning laws and supporting programs that encourage general use of open spaces*

- **Injury Prevention**
  - Proper road construction, in which pedestrians and bicyclists are taken into consideration, as well as reduced speeds and smaller roads can lead to fewer accidental injuries for all parties.
  - Properly maintained housing and the promotion of injury prevention tools may lead to fewer accidental injuries within homes.
Links…

- *Environmental Exposures*
  - Poor housing stock, heat islands, and dependence on private vehicles for transportation leads to poor environmental quality which in turn may increase and exacerbate pulmonary complications such as asthma and COPD, as well as other health concerns
The “Health in All Policies” approach

- “An innovative strategy that introduces improved population health outcomes and closing the health gap as goals to be shared across all parts of government. HiAP seeks to address complex health challenges through an integrated policy response across sectors.”

There are clear links between the health and environmental sustainability agendas with respect to food production and consumption.

- reducing over-consumption of food, which contributes to overweight and obesity and also has ecological impact
- increasing the consumption of plant-based food—fruit and vegetables—which is better for health and reduces the ecological footprint
- preparing and consuming food closer to its source of origin reduces packaging, transport costs and environmental impact
- greenhouse gas emissions and pollution can be reduced through increased bicycle and public transport use


Also see: http://www.health.sa.gov.au/PEHS/health-in-all-policies.htm
The ultimate goals of public health and urban development require sustainability—this needs to be made explicit

- Public health must point out policies and activities that, when implemented in other sectors, can help to improve health and achieve health equity and reduce the ecological footprint.

- Urban development must employ strategies that are economically, socially, and politically viable, that promote health and that reduce the ecological footprint.

Recognition that we live in a global community, and that depletion of resources and destruction of the environment is not an option!