# Health Issues Related to Community Design

**HEALTHY COMMUNITY DESIGN**

*Fact Sheet Series*

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recognizes several significant health issues related to community design and land use. These issues include

### Accessibility

Poorly designed communities can make it difficult for people with mobility impairments or other disabling conditions to move about their environment; consequently, people with a disability often are more vulnerable to environmental barriers.

### Children's Health and the Built Environment

Healthy community design can benefit children in many important ways. Much is now known about designing, building, and renovating schools to promote children's health and school performance. Planning parks can be invaluable as part of a strategy of community design that is healthy and nurturing for children.

### Older Adults' Health and the Built Environment

Older adults interact with the built environment in ways that reflect changing lifestyles and changing physical capabilities. After retirement, people have more time to enjoy parks, recreational activities, and other community facilities.

### Gentrification

Where people live, work, and play has an impact on their health. Several factors create disparities in a community's health. Examples include socioeconomic status, land use/the built environment, race/ethnicity, and environmental injustice. In addition, displacement has many health implications that contribute to disparities among special populations, including the poor, women, children, the elderly, and members of racial/ethnic minority groups.

### Health Impact Assessment

Health impact assessments (HIAs) can be used to evaluate objectively the potential health effects of a project or policy before it is built or implemented. It can provide recommendations to increase positive health outcomes and minimize adverse health outcomes. The HIA process brings public health issues to the attention of persons who make decisions about areas that fall outside of traditional public health arenas, such as transportation or land use.

### Injury

One of the critical public health challenges related to community design, particularly transportation planning, is the interaction between motorized and nonmotorized transportation.

### Mental Health

The effects of the community design choices we make and the opportunities those choices afford or deny us are only just now beginning to be understood. Such effects not only can influence community members' physical health but their mental health as well.

National Center for Environmental Health
Division of Emergency and Environmental Health Services

## Physical Activity

According to the 1999 U.S. Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity and Health, people of all ages who are generally inactive can improve their health and well-being by becoming even moderately active on a regular basis.

## Respiratory Health and Air Pollution

Transportation-related pollutants are one of the largest contributors to unhealthy air quality. Many of these common air pollutants, such as ozone, sulfur dioxide, and particulate matter, are respiratory irritants that can aggravate asthma either alone or in combined action with other environmental factors. In addition, recent research findings are beginning to point to a potential link between some air pollutants and the initial onset of certain respiratory conditions.

## Social Capital

The fabric of a community and the community pool of human resources available to it is often called its "social capital." This term refers to the individual and communal time and energy that is available for such things as community improvement, social networking, civic engagement, personal recreation, and other activities that create social bonds between individuals and groups.

## Water Quality

Poorly planned growth and the subsequent loss of green space that often accompanies it can affect both surface and groundwater quality. In the natural environment, rainfall is either intercepted by vegetation or percolates slowly through the soil to receiving waters.

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