

Plan4Health: Thomas County Coalition

Thomas County, KS

Summary

Plan4Health connects communities across the country, funding work at the intersection of planning and public health. Anchored by American Planning Association (APA) chapters and American Public Health Association (APHA) affiliates, Plan4Health supports creative partnerships to build sustainable, cross-sector coalitions. Thomas County Healthy Living seeks to adopt pedestrian friendly safe street designs; improve food and beverage offerings in schools, workplaces, and public facilities; and educate residents on their goal of being the “healthiest county in Kansas.”

Challenge

Obesity is a major concern in Thomas County, KS with 32.3 percent of adults and nearly 30 percent of children being classified as obese. Income inequalities are prevalent and obesity rates are worse when comparing lower versus higher income families. Obesity is a risk factor for a number of adverse health conditions including diabetes, hypertension and heart disease. 22.1 percent of adults in Thomas County have high blood pressure and 8 percent have age-adjusted diabetes. 46 percent of students live within a quarter mile of school, but only 10 percent walk or bike to school due to various factors including safety concerns and lack of encouragement. Throughout the county a lack of sidewalks, sidewalks in disrepair and a lack of bike paths and racks have been identified as a deterrent to physical activity. Many residents depend on fast food due to the poor availability of fresh fruits and vegetables, which is also contributing to the rise in obesity.

Solution

The Thomas County Coalition will create environments where the healthy choice is the easy choice for Thomas County residents. The coalition will build off of the community’s first Walking and Biking Master Plan, adopted in June 2015, by implementing a Complete Streets policy, adopting protected bike lines, and requiring developers to construct multi-use paths on future projects. Through vending and procurement policies, education, and the establishment of school gardens, the coalition will implement community-wide improvements to the food and beverage environments as well.



Your Involvement is Key

Residents of Thomas County can stay engaged and up-to-date on coalition news and events by visiting the coalition’s website (www.thomascountycoalition.com), Facebook page (www.facebook.com/thomascountycoalition) and by following @TCCoalition on Twitter.

To learn more about the Thomas County Coalition and all coalitions participating in Plan4Health, check out the project website (www.plan4health.us).

Join the national conversation at the intersection of planning and public health on social media by using and following #plan4health.

Results

The coalition has not wasted any time getting started and has accomplished quite a bit during the early months of the project. At this point, the coalition has received 14 commitments from partners and is continuing to look for other opportunities to collaborate. Various workshops have been held as well. Multiple Complete Streets workshops for the coalition, the City Planning Commission, and the Colby City Council members have been completed. A Square-Foot Gardening workshop attracted a diverse group of attendees - and many indicated an interest in participating in future workshops.

In late February, a healthy eating and active living resolution was presented, adopted, and signed by County Commissioners. The readiness and excitement around the resolution is telling of how the community is supportive of the coalition's work and of making the healthy choice the easy choice in Thomas County.

Contact

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"The Plan4health grant provides a large boost to our efforts to create an environment conducive to healthy lifestyles and is helping us realize the coalition's vision of creating a community where making the healthy choice is the easy choice."

- Sue Evans, Executive Director, Northwest Kansas Council on Substance Abuse, Inc.

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