Plan4Health: Thomas County Coalition

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. Approximately 22.1 percent of adults in Thomas County have high blood pressure and 8 percent have age-adjusted diabetes. Although 46 percent of students live within a quarter mile of school, 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 deterrents 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.

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 www.plan4health.us. Join the national conversation at the intersection of planning and public health with #plan4health.

“This project has impacted employees and members of the community in more ways than one! One of many examples is the bike racks that were provided by the Thomas County Coalition allow a safe place for cyclists to park their bikes while doing business at our local courthouse.”

- Susan Guill, Thomas County employee
**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.

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**RESULTS**

Thomas County has been successful in reaching important stakeholders in the community thus far. A resolution was passed during the first initial meeting with Thomas County Commissioners to move forward with access to healthy foods and physical activity for all Thomas County employees. Thomas County Commissioners appointed a group to work on wellness policy ideas called the Thomas County Wellness Committee. The committee is currently working through policies to present to Thomas County Commissioners. Not only have county stakeholders been extremely open to increasing access to healthy foods and physical activity in the workplace, but the Colby Planning Commission has come up with a Complete Streets policy to recommend at the next city council meeting. Having a Complete Streets policy passed would not only impact people of Thomas County, but visitors as well.

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