

Partnering4Health
Policy, Systems, and Environmental Change (PSE) Approach to
Improved Population Health and Reduced Chronic Disease Burden

Health problems are heavily influenced by policies and environments that either sustain healthy behaviors and practices or fail to support healthy choices. Major public health problems will not be solved solely by individual actions and healthy choices, but by coming together to forge a society where healthy choices can be made more easily. In the *Forward to Policy and Environmental Change: New Directions for Public Health*, Dr. James Marks, then the head of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) stated:

The major public health problems of our time will not be solved solely by individual actions and health choices, but by individuals coming together to make our society one in which healthy choices are easy, fun, and popular... It is becoming increasingly clear that public health practitioners must address these policies, these environments, and the support and obstacles they provide relative to healthy behaviors as the fundamental means of intervention. This also means that health practitioners must all engage increasingly with the non-health sectors of our society, so those sectors understand how they can contribute to the health of people in their communities.¹

That same report defined policies as laws, regulations, and rules (both formal and informal). Examples include laws and regulations that restrict smoking in public buildings and organizational rules that provide time off during work hours for physical activity. Environmental interventions include changes to the economic, social, or physical environments such as incorporating walking paths and recreation areas into new community development designs; making low-fat choices available in cafeterias; and removing ashtrays from meeting rooms.

Policy Change	Systems Change	Environmental Change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Policy change includes the passing of laws, ordinances, resolutions, mandates, regulations, or rules. ▪ Policies greatly influence the choices we make in our lives. Laws that are passed (like workplace policies, school policies) greatly influence the daily decisions we make about our health. ▪ Examples: Adding a tax on unhealthy food, passing a law allowing residents to plant community gardens in vacant lots, schools establishing a policy that prohibits junk food in school fundraising drives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Systems change involves change made to the rules within an organization. Systems change and policy change often work hand-in-hand. ▪ Systems change impacts all elements of an organization. Often systems change focuses on changing infrastructure within a school, park, worksite or health setting. ▪ Examples: Creating a community plan to account for health impacts of new projects, creating a certification system for school bake sales to ensure they are in line with school wellness policy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Environmental change is a change made to the physical environment. ▪ Environmental change can be as simple as installing bike signage on already established bike routes or as complex as sidewalk installation and pedestrian friendly intersections to promote walking and biking among its citizens. ▪ Examples: Municipality undertakes a planning process to ensure better pedestrian and bicycle access to main roads and parks; community development includes neighborhood corridors with pedestrian accommodations meeting the needs of seniors (e.g. adequate benches and ramped sidewalks).
<p><i>Adapted from Cook County Public Health: http://www.cookcountypublichealth.org/files/cppw/pse%20change.pdf</i></p>		

Ten years later, the U.S. Surgeon General convened heads of 17 departments, agencies, and offices across the federal government to create a *National Prevention Strategy*ⁱⁱ, recognizing that many of the strongest predictors of health and well-being fall outside of the health care setting. Housing, transportation, education, workplaces, and environment are major elements that impact the physical and mental health of Americans. The idea behind the National Prevention Strategy was to find ways of weaving prevention into the fabric of people’s everyday lives. The Strategy identified four strategic directions and seven targeted priorities. The strategic directions were to provide a strong foundation for the nation’s prevention effort, and were as follows:

- **Healthy and Safe Community Environments:** Create, sustain, and recognize communities that promote health and wellness through prevention.
- **Clinical and Community Preventive Services:** Ensure that prevention-focused health care and community prevention efforts are available, integrated, and mutually reinforcing.
- **Empowered People:** Support people in making healthy choices.
- **Elimination of Health Disparities:** Eliminate disparities, improving the quality of life for all Americans.

The Strategy’s seven targeted priorities were intended to collectively improve the health and wellness of the entire U.S. population, including those groups disproportionately affected by disease and injury. The seven targeted priorities were as follows:

- Tobacco Free Living
- Preventing Drug Abuse and Excessive Alcohol Use
- Healthy Eating
- Active Living
- Injury and Violence Free Living
- Reproductive and Sexual Health
- Mental and Emotional Well-Being

In September 2014, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) launched a three-year initiative to prevent and control chronic disease at the community level. Named the [National Implementation and Dissemination for Chronic Disease Prevention](#) — or Partnering4Health — the CDC initiative is designed to build capacity in communities, implement sustainable change strategies, and

"Through this project, we have had the opportunity to go beyond a culture of reacting to poor health, and instead move towards cultivating a community environment that inherently promotes the physical and mental well being and safety of all residents. This can only be accomplished through cross collaborative partnership that brings planning, public health, and social services together to achieve a common goal."

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"This opportunity was the catalyst needed to not only understand the impact of health in policy and planning, but to adjust our approach by integrating health into planning, especially in comprehensive planning.."

Mary Ellen Gray, Planner, Kent County, Delaware

enable national organizations to support healthier communities where people live, learn, work, and play. The five national organizations collaborating to support the 96 communities funded through this initiative the [American Heart Association](#) (AHA), the [American Planning Association](#) (APA), the [National WIC Association](#) (NWA), [Directors of Health Promotion and Education](#) (DHPE), and the [Society of Public Health Educators](#) (SOPHE). Partnering4Health is addressing all four of the strategic directions from the National Prevention Strategy and three of the seven targeted priorities – tobacco free living, healthy eating, and active living.

ⁱ Marks James (2001). Forward in Association of State and Territorial Directors of Health Promotion and Public Health Education (now Directors of Health Promotion and Education) and U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Policy and Environmental Change: New Directions for Public Health*. Available at <http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.dhpe.org/resource/resmgr/docs/healthpolicyexecsumm.pdf> accessed 4 16 2017.

ⁱⁱ National Prevention Council, *National Prevention Strategy*, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General, 2011. Available at <https://www.surgeongeneral.gov/priorities/prevention/strategy/report.pdf> accessed 4 26 2017.