

# Steps Toward Health Equity and Well-Being

## Actions Cities Can Take in Transportation Planning

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## OVERVIEW OF THE STATEWIDE HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PARTNERSHIP (SHIP)

Dakota County Public Health has received funding from the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) since 2009 through the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) grant to promote chronic disease prevention and health equity in our community through strategies focused on healthy eating (MN EATS), physical activity (MN MOVES), commercial tobacco-free living (MN commercial tobacco free) and mental well-being (MN Well-being) strategy areas.

### MN MOVES (SHIP ACTIVE LIVING) AT A GLANCE

The objective of the MN MOVES strategy is to increase physical activity – primarily walking and bicycling – throughout the state of Minnesota. A comprehensive approach through policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) changes is known to increase access to physical activity opportunities and support behavior changes. These activities focus on creating opportunities that can reach the greatest number of people without the need for equipment or leisure time. As such, much work in MN MOVES emphasizes active transportation – walking, biking, and rolling to destinations – creating opportunities for movement as part of everyday living. In addition, because people are pedestrians during the “first and last mile” of trips on transit, the promotion of transit use is integrated within the MN MOVES strategy.

#### Dakota County SHIP Active Living Primary Activities

*Improving Safety and Access for Active Transportation and Mobility:* Enhancing access to places for physical activity through local planning involves implementing policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) changes, such as supportive policies and practices to increase access to trails, transit, and nearby facilities and destinations (such as parks or grocery stores).

*Safe Routes to Schools:* Safe Routes to School is a comprehensive strategy to instill lifelong habits to engage in physical activity, health, and safe behaviors when walking, biking, and rolling. Several Dakota County school districts have re-engaged in this strategy following the completion of their Safe Routes to School Comprehensive Plans. Safe Routes to School, city planning, and transportation have mutual benefits for the entire community, when working to strive for common improvements.

### MN WELL-BEING (MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING) AT A GLANCE

The objective of the MN Well-being strategy is to create opportunities for partnership with communities to create equitable, healthy, and positive conditions that promote well-being for all Minnesotans. This strategy aims to achieve this through creating opportunities for healing, social connection, and belonging and embedding these opportunities within the other SHIP strategy areas. **Well-being and active living are integrally connected in multiple ways.** Creating more equitable communities - including giving attention to transportation equity - is crucial for fostering well-being. Below, the *Action Cities Can Take* section highlights specific examples of how your city can foster well-being and active living through transportation planning.

#### Dakota County SHIP Well-Being Primary Activity

*Foster Social Connection and Belonging:* Dakota County SHIP is focusing on social connection and belonging as our primary strategy for fostering well-being. We are doing this through creating supportive spaces for families with young children, integrating opportunities for connection into community settings (such as farmers markets), and through collaborating with parks, libraries, and Dakota County cities to boost social connection and belonging in programming and planning.

## PRIORITY POPULATIONS

Populations less likely to meet physical activity recommendations are at greater risk for other health conditions (including mental health challenges) and experience greater health disparities. Nearly half of Minnesotan adults do not meet physical activity recommendations. Due to a variety of systemic and historical factors, the prevalence of inactivity is greatest in rural areas, among people of color, older adults, and persons with disabilities, women, recent immigrants, LGBTQ+ individuals, those with lower educational attainment, and those in lower income groups. Therefore, it is important to recommend and prioritize improved active living in areas with a high concentration of these populations.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement is the foundation of creating effective public health practice, including the successful implementation of SHIP strategies. To work toward our goal of chronic disease prevention, Dakota County SHIP, and communities across the county, collaborate by exchanging knowledge and resources, developing projects which are community-driven, and engage together in problem-solving and decision-making. Bringing together public health expertise and the collective wisdom of communities allows us to identify strengths and challenges more accurately and to develop more effective solutions.

## ACTIONS CITIES CAN TAKE TO FOSTER EQUITY AND WELL-BEING

**How to use this document:** Below are examples of how cities and communities can integrate equity, social connection and belonging into the work. We recognize this is an extensive list of examples, some of which you may already be working on and that not all the examples provided may be possible in your context. **Our team encourages you to pick one item to begin with.** The Dakota County Active Living team can assist you with any of the following free services:

- Grant funding for Bicycle and Pedestrian Plans – funding possible through SHIP
- Grant writing made available to cities related to active living infrastructure, including for Safe Route to School
- Connecting city partners to community organizations
- Participating as active members on planning committees and by attending community engagement events
- Providing knowledge and skills in research and resource sharing on best practices
- Providing technical assistance support including any of the action steps listed below:
  - Document review (policy, procedures, comprehensive plans)
  - Assistance finding health related data and metrics
  - Advising on community engagement strategies
  - Attending community events

The Dakota County Active Living team can also support your city in the above ways should you decide to implement any of the following actions of how to promote health equity and well-being by integration in transportation planning.

### EXAMPLE ACTIONS

#### Community Engagement in Planning

- Use culturally sensitive, creative means of community engagement
- Build relationships with community leaders from diverse communities
- Provide training in implicit bias; past and present discriminatory planning practices, health equity, etc. to city staff involved in planning
- Appoint and hire members of diverse communities to serve on planning boards/commissions

#### Data Collection Practices

- Invest in data collection about the needs of diverse populations and disaggregate data by race/ethnicity, gender, and income to identify gaps, trends, strengths, and needs
- Complete a systems-wide analysis of transportation equity and transit accessibility and connectivity (including walking/biking/transit audits) to identify existing opportunities and existing inequities and use this to define investments and inform decision making
- Synthesize findings from community engagement and data investigations into a clear set of design and planning principles to develop and evaluate project planning scenarios
- Integrate diverse measures for healthy, inclusive, and accessible communities into outcome evaluation of plans and projects including transportation, socioeconomic, and health metrics

#### Cross agency collaboration

- Appoint cross-sector officials from diverse communities to serve as an advisory group/board/committee with jurisdiction across various departments, agencies, and levels of government to inform and provide recommendations to decision-makers
- Create and sustain a platform for ongoing conversations among elected/appointed officials, department/agency leaders, planners, engineers, and other policymakers to discuss advancing health equity goals and avoid auto-centric goals

#### Land Use Approaches

- Revise land use codes to be inclusive of contributions from diverse communities and prioritize mixed-income, mixed-use, walkable, appropriate for all abilities, and transit-accessible development while preventing displacement
- Consider and allow for culturally influenced uses and adaption of space in private and public spaces such as food gardens, murals, and street vendors
- Enforce tools and controls to prevent unintended health inequities, such as displacement and racial/economic segregation, in existing and proposed land use policies

- Scoring and weighting criteria should reward projects that allow residents to remain in place and penalize projects that displace residents
- Consider an equity impact assessment, similar to an environmental impact assessment
- Consider Health in All Policies (HiAP) outcome evaluation measures

### **Policy and Regulations**

- Review existing policies and procedures for the purposes of intervening in systems that perpetuate racial inequities to eradicate implicit and explicit racial bias and integrate equity and health into government operations and decisions
  - Examples of Plans: Pedestrian/Bicycle Plan, City Comprehensive Plan, Safe Routes to School Comprehensive Plan
  - Examples of Policies/Procedures: land use zoning, decriminalize jaywalking, speed limit policy, hiring and retention policy and procedures, exclusionary zoning
- Review/update parking codes to incorporate walking and bicycling infrastructure (bike racks, sidewalk connections/wider sidewalks, more walking paths, lighting, trees, benches)
- Prioritize multimodal level of service and pedestrian-oriented development, such as equitable transit-oriented development, Complete Streets, mixed-use/higher densities with multimodal transportation options
- Transition responsibility for sidewalk construction, repair, and maintenance from property owners to municipalities
- Change city ordinances to prioritize people walking and biking over people driving (e.g. decriminalizing jaywalking, disallowing right, red, and permissive left turns)
- Create a [Vision Zero](#) Resolution to formalize and prioritize eliminating fatal and severe traffic crashes to improve mobility for all community members

### **Funding Strategies**

- Develop capital spending and program requirements that prioritize safety, equity, public health, maintenance, and access
- Increase investment in transit, protected sidewalks, and protected bike lanes

### **Social Connection and Belonging**

#### *Public Spaces*

- Design safe and appealing places for all ages to gather that reflect the cultural diversity of your community
- Equitably maintain the quality of public spaces and use equity to guide maintenance decisions
- Decriminalize loitering
- Prohibit hostile architecture that discourages sitting and lying down
- Establish shared-use policies to open schoolyards during out-of-school time
- Allow fire pits during winter in public parks to encourage socializing
- Work with residents to determine how public spaces would best help them connect

#### *Prioritize connection in transportation systems*

- Invest in public transit, walking and bicycling networks and appropriate supports (such as crosswalks, lower traffic speeds and volumes, air quality control, maintenance, and frequency of transit service). Note: Make sure to safeguard affordable housing
- Invest in measures to make routes between homes and transit hubs more appealing (e.g. benches, trees, lighting on walking routes between residential areas and transit stops)
- Use alternative measures (other than vehicle level of service) to evaluate transportation systems (e.g. Complete Streets, Green Streets, Health Impact Assessment)
- Support elements that enhance public life (e.g. Safe Routes to School, Play Streets, Walking School Bus, Little Free Libraries at bus stops, public art)

## KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

The work of Active Living Dakota County is directly connected to creating equitable communities where all people can thrive. Below are some key terms related to equity and building a shared understanding in our work.

**Complete Streets:** Streets that provide safe, convince, efficient and accessible use by people of all ages and abilities.

**Equity:** Just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential. Unlocking the promise of the nation by unleashing the promise in us all

**Health Disparities:** Differences in health, among groups of people because of social, economic, and environmental conditions that often stem from historical and contemporary disenfranchisement and discrimination.

**Health Equity:** The highest possible standard of health for all people and giving special attention to the needs of those at greatest risk of poor health, based on social conditions and historical disenfranchisement.

**Health Inequity:** Health disparities among groups of people within an entire population that are avoidable, unfair and/or unjust. Caused by social, economic, and environmental conditions and inequities.

Social inequities occur when individuals and institutions oppress and/or create harm, barriers and disadvantages based on race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, immigration status, physical and mental abilities or any other core aspects of identity.

Social oppression can lead to poorer outcomes and less advantages, which often lead to economic disadvantage including barriers to education, employment financial assistance (loans, bank accounts), lack of medical care/insurance, barriers to safe and affordable housing and transportation and/or lack of access to nutrition, culturally appropriate foods.

Economic disadvantage leads to environmental conditions that negatively dictates health outcomes. Such factors include transportation accessibility, safety, proximity to parks/playgrounds, walkability, zip close/geography, quality of air conditions, water quality concerns, high tobacco retailer density, limited or no close access to nutrient-dense foods.

**Multimodal:** Characterized by many different modes of transportation, such as automobile, public transit, walking and bicycling. Refers to the use of more than one mode of transportation to reach a destination.

**Policy, Systems, and Environmental (PSE) Change:** Sustainable, long lasting changes in on or more of the following:

**Policy:** ordinances or rules within an organization or geographic area

**Systems:** “the way things are typically done” – this can include relationships or connections within and between organizations, resource allocation, procedure, etc.

**Environment:** social, economic, or physical surroundings

**Transportation Equity:** relating to how transportation practitioners (county staff, city planners, transit authority, local bicycle/pedestrian advocates) can provide access to affordable and reliable transportation (and specifically pedestrian and bicycle facilities and programs) to fairly meet the needs of all community members, particularly traditionally underserved populations.

## REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

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