

Increased awareness of today's emerging health concerns is prompting communities to create momentum toward assisting and encouraging people in making healthy choices—where they live, learn, work, and play—through sustainable changes that address the major chronic disease risk factors—tobacco, physical inactivity, and unhealthy eating—to become a healthier community.

## WHAT IS A HEALTHY COMMUNITY?

Across the nation and world, definitions of a healthy community include:

- The World Health Organization defines a healthy city or community as, *“one that is safe with affordable housing and accessible transportation systems, work for all who want to work, a healthy and safe environment with a sustainable ecosystem, and offers access to health care services which focus on prevention and staying healthy.”*<sup>1</sup>
- According to the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors (NACDD), *“Healthy Communities is a growing global effort to improve the health and well-being of individuals and families, primarily through policies that sustain positive, lasting changes to local, state, and na-tional systems and environments.”*<sup>2</sup>



For the purposes of the Toolkit, a healthy community is defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as one that is *“continuously creating and improving those physical and social environments and expanding those community resources that enable people to support each other in performing all the functions of life and in developing to their maximum potential.”*<sup>3</sup>

Efforts to build healthier communities begin locally, including the people (i.e. family, neighborhood, stakeholders, elected officials) working together to address the health of their community. Building and supporting community environments that make healthy choices easy, available, and affordable is critical to helping people achieve and maintain good health. Designing a healthy community challenges individuals, communities, and professionals to work together to assess, address, and change both the behaviors of a population of individuals and the conditions that affect their health.

A healthy community initiative depends to a large extent on human, institutional, organizational, environmental assets and other resources already available within the community. By identifying these resources communities can modify the environment to make healthy choices practical, acceptable, and available to all community members. Changing policies, systems, and/or environments (PSE) in a community can make a big impact with limited time and resources, as well as help address chronic disease health issues.

PSE is instrumental for effectively improving the health behaviors of a community. The following includes definitions and examples of PSE change.

## POLICY, SYSTEMS, AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

### Policy Change

Policy change includes the passing of laws, ordinances, resolutions, mandates, regulations, rules, protocols, and/or procedures that are designed to guide or influence positive behavior change and the choices we make in our lives. Government bodies (federal, state, local level), school districts and schools,

*“It is unreasonable to expect that people will change their behavior easily when so many forces in the social, cultural, and physical environment conspire against such change.”*

*(Smedly and Syme, 2000)<sup>4</sup>*

park districts, healthcare organizations (hospitals, health systems), worksites, and other community institutions (jails, daycare centers, senior living centers, faith institutions) all have and make policies (either legislative or organizational).

Examples of legislative policies include:

- Clean indoor air laws
- Regulations governing the national school lunch program

Examples of organizational policies include:

- Schools requiring healthy food options for all students
- Policies that provide time off during work hours for physical activity

## Systems Change

Systems change involves modifications made to the rules within an organization (school, a parks and recreation department, transportation department, business, etc.). Systems change and policy change often work hand-in-hand. Systems change often focuses on changing infrastructure within a school, park, worksite, or health setting.

Examples are:

- Implementing the national school lunch program across state school systems
- Ensuring a hospital system goes tobacco free



## Environmental Change

Environmental change is transformation to the environment that influence people's practices and behaviors. Examples of changes to the environment may be physical, social, or economic and include:

*Physical:* Structural changes or programs or services:

- Incorporating sidewalks, paths, pedestrian friendly intersections, and recreation areas into community design (complete streets policy)
- Availability of healthy food choices in restaurants or cafeterias
- The presence of comprehensive school health education curricula in schools

*Social:* A positive change in attitudes or behavior about policies that promote health or an increase in supportive attitudes regarding a health practice:

- Increase in favorable attitudes of community decision makers about the importance of nonsmoking policies

*Economic:* The presence of financial disincentives or incentives to encourage a desired behavior:

- Charging higher prices for sugar sweetened beverages and non-healthy food items to decrease their use

**IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO KNOW HOW TO BE HEALTHY – YOU NEED PRACTICAL, READILY AVAILABLE HEALTHY OPTIONS AROUND YOU...**

## PSE CHANGE TO SUPPORT A HEALTHY COMMUNITY

For many years, health programs have focused on individual behavior, assuming that if you teach people what will make them healthy, they will do it. Unfortunately, being healthy is not just about individual choices. Where a person lives affects how he/she lives – a person simply cannot make healthy decisions if healthy options are not available. Policy, systems, and environmental change make

healthier choices a real and feasible option for every community member by addressing the laws, rules, environments, and choices that impact behavior.

Community sectors can also play an integral role in address health policy, systems, and environmental change in a community. Communities can often be categorized into sectors or areas of focus, which includes "various groups of people in the larger community might be divided into for reasons of common social, political, economic, cultural, or religious interests."<sup>5</sup> While

community sectors can mean a variety of different things, they can support the process of building a health community by influencing persons in that sector, as well as persons external to or not affiliated with that sector.

The SD DOH is focusing on the school, community, worksite, and healthcare sectors in SD communities to guide the community health needs assessment process; however every community is unique in what works to build a healthy community environment. The following are some examples of policy, systems, and environmental changes within sectors of a community.

Setting	Programs/Events	PSE Change
Sector	Programs or Events	Policy, Systems, and Environmental Change
School	Celebrate National Nutrition Month	Add fruits and vegetables to the a la carte options in schools.
Community	Host a community bike ride and parade	Implement a complete streets policy to ensure community roads are constructed for safe biking, walking and driving.
Worksite	Participate in 'Great American Smokeout' event	Establish a tobacco-free taskforce to advance worksite healthy policies and practices.
Healthcare	Hold health screenings for staff	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Implement a healthy vending machine policy that offers healthy snacks at an affordable price;</li> <li>2. Establish a building sponsored wellness team.</li> </ol>

Health problems cannot be solved solely through changing individuals' actions and health behaviors. Communities must work collectively to make healthy choices easy, acceptable, and supported. Communities that implement policies and create environments that incorporate these characteristics are healthier and more satisfying places to live, work, and play.

Change in a community can be achieved at many levels, including organizational, individual, and interpersonal. Community-level changes such as policy, systems, and environmental changes, are often more "sustainable, impact infrastructures, and aid in shifting social norms."<sup>6</sup> Education and awareness can influence individual behavior change; however, it is vital to address community conditions and barriers in the environment to support healthy behavior change in communities. The Health Impact Pyramid developed by the CDC and illustrated in Figure 1, demonstrates the comprehensive effect that socioeconomic factors have on community health, and how influencing those factors within PSE change "provides the foundation for creating sustainable public health change at the population level."<sup>7</sup>

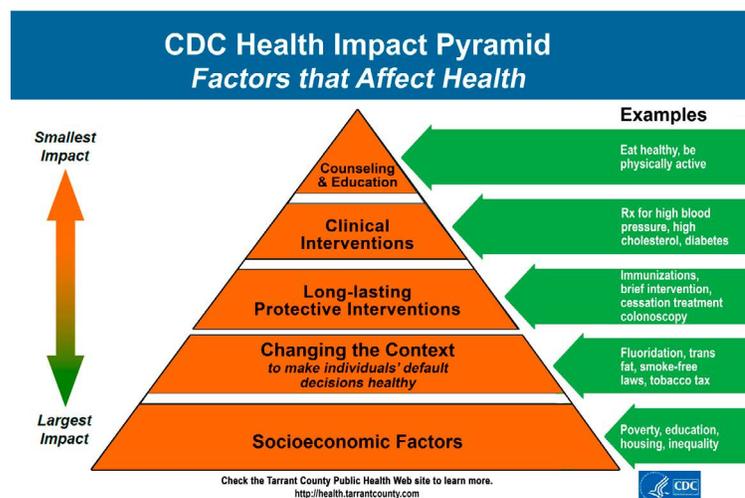


Figure 1. Health Impact Pyramid

## CONCLUSION

Policy, systems, and environmental changes do affect health behavior. For a community to make a difference and improve its overall health, it has a responsibility to shape the basic conditions that affect the lives of its residents. Efforts at preventing and reducing chronic disease can be addressed through multiple strategies, including addressing underlying issues that affect community health, providing chronic disease education and awareness to the community, and improving the environment where people live, work, and receive health care. The resources in the South Dakota Good & Healthy Community Toolkit will provide a community with information on the steps to identify and address its needs and prepare it for implementing policy, systems, and environmental changes to encourage improvements that will improve community health.

## Resources

Refer to the following resources for additional information on suggestions for building healthy communities.

Healthy Community
Journal Articles on Program Successes: <i>Communities in Action</i> . Healthy Communities Program. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Healthy Community Design. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Community Health Living Index. YMCA.
Healthy Community Design Toolkit. American Planning Association AZ Chapter MAC21 Project
Encouraging Involvement in Community Work. The Community Tool Box, the University of Kansas.
Winning Health Promotion Strategies. Aon Hewitt

## References

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