

Building Healthy Communities

Healthy Communities

Where you live affects your health. The way our communities are designed can influence our lives in many ways, from the quality of the air we breathe to how physically active we are.






How you live affects the environment. The choices you make everyday can have an impact on the environment in a positive or negative way. We share our surroundings with each other and must work together to make changes for the better. Municipalities, health units and others are working to create healthier communities by planning for trails and sidewalks, parks and public spaces, safe roads, reductions in personal vehicle use, access to healthy local food, energy conservation and many other health supporting features. You can help too! Good health starts with each person, but it takes a community to support it.

**Healthy Community Planning & Design
= A Healthier Community
= A Healthier You**

Healthy communities are ones that are planned and designed with people in mind. They are communities that strive for a strong economy, a clean environment and a healthy population. A community protects and promotes the health of its residents when it: provides opportunities for physical activity and recreation; ensures access to healthy foods; creates a safe physical environment; provides infrastructure and buildings designed for people of all ages and abilities; protects and sustains the natural environment; and encourages citizen participation in municipal affairs. Creating a healthy community requires the support, energy and assets of all the people who live there.

Think about the decisions your municipality makes and the actions you take to help create a healthier community.

Did you know?

-  Neighbourhoods that are spread out and car-dependent result in fewer people walking and cycling, which contributes to poor health.
-  Having access to fresh, healthy foods at neighbourhood grocery stores and farmers' markets increases the chance that a person's food choices will be healthier.
-  Designing communities to accommodate cars results in more vehicles on the road. This can increase the risk of motor-vehicle related injuries and deaths.
-  Preserving and protecting trees and greenspace is critical to the quality of our air.
-  Having access to open space and the opportunity to interact with others at public gathering places can increase a person's sense of well-being.



You can make a difference when you...

- Walk or cycle more often and use your car less; buy fresh food at your local farmers' market; conserve energy in your home; and volunteer with a local club or group.
- Speak with your neighbours about the issues affecting your community and discuss ways to address them.
- Learn more about your municipality's official plan and how it affects your community.
 - The official plan guides how land should be used in your community, such as where housing, industry, shops, parks and schools will be located, what services are needed, and how road and transportation systems are designed.
 - Official plans are updated at least every five years. A copy of the plan is made available to the public and your local council must ensure a public meeting is held about the plan.
- Contact your municipality at any time to discuss opportunities for input into your community's official plan. Any person can provide written comments and/or speak at the public meeting about the proposed plan.
- Participate on a municipal or community committee on issues of mutual interest or concern.

Municipalities show leadership when they...

- Regularly maintain and upgrade sidewalks, trails and walkways so they are safe and convenient for pedestrian movement throughout the year.
- Plan for compact and mixed land use development that reduces distances that people need to travel to jobs, shopping, schools and recreational areas.
- Provide a variety of transportation and housing options for people of all ages, income and abilities.
- Include official plan policies that support energy conservation and reflect healthy community design standards.
- Build within community boundaries where infrastructure, roads and services already exist.

For more information:

Refer to other fact sheets in this series: Air Quality, Active Transportation, Road Safety and Food Access.