

Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant

SUCCESS STORY 2017

Health in All Policies

Building Healthy Communities through Parks

Issue: Parks, open space, and urban tree canopy provide a wide range of health, economic, social, cultural and economic benefits and serve important functions as essential infrastructure serving California communities. Maintaining and enhancing parks, open space, and tree canopy is imperative to creating healthy communities. Despite the scientific evidence that these resources enhance population health, disparities in access and the distribution of their benefits across populations still persist. For example, a 2016 study in Los Angeles County found that communities with less park space per capita had higher rates of premature mortality from cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and childhood obesity. African-Americans and Latinos were more likely than Asians and Whites to live in areas with less park space per capita. (1)

Intervention: The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) has increased activity on a variety of park-related initiatives to address inequities in park access. For example, CDPH staff in partnership with the Health in All Policies Task Force, which brings together 22 departments, agencies, and offices to work collaboratively on issues, developed an Action Plan to Promote Parks and Healthy Tree Canopy. One example action is for the State Department of Parks and CDPH to “conduct a pilot program to increase physical activity in at least 3 un-programmed and/or under-programmed parks targeting SNAP-Ed eligible populations.” Specifically, the Pilot Program will:

- 1) Select parks that are currently underutilized with no or little programming, located within walking distance of neighborhoods that have a high concentration of eligible Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed) recipients.
- 2) Make Physical Activity (PA) programs available through SNAP-ED funding, and market the programs to the eligible residents.
- 3) Conduct evaluation to assess whether PA programming in parks is a strong SNAP-Ed intervention that can be expanded in the future.

Impact: Local community parks are an ideal setting for promoting community health because they provide open space; are free to the public; and provide space for communities to exercise, socialize and connect with nature. However, in high need areas, some parks are underutilized. The pilot evaluation may help demonstrate how SNAP-ED (PA) funding can transform underutilized parks into thriving health zones and empower communities to reclaim community park facilities. The pilot aspires to strengthen local partnerships between park agency, health department, non-profits, resident “champions,” and public safety departments, when possible. Besides improving the health of communities through direct PA programming, this State level Health/Parks partnership can set an example for other state agencies and local government.

Citation

1. Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. Parks and Public Health in Los Angeles County: A Cities and Communities Report; May 2016.