

Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant

SUCCESS STORY 2018

Health in All Policies

Healthy Parks, Healthy People

Public Health Issue: Neighborhood parks are necessary infrastructure in healthy communities because they promote physical activity, provide green space, and contribute to community empowerment. Despite the scientific understanding that parks enhance population health, disproportionately low access in low-income communities and communities of color persists; these are the same communities that already face health inequities. There are many examples of inequities in park space access throughout California including a 2016 study in Los Angeles County, which found a correlation between communities with less park space per capita and high 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.

Intervention: Given the positive health impacts associated with parks and other safe places for people to recreate, it is imperative to increase access to spaces especially for low-income communities of color. By partnering with the California Parks Department through the Health in All Policies Task Force, the California Department of Public Health has been able to influence how and where park resources are allocated. Earlier this year, California voters approved a \$650 million Statewide Park Program to create new parks and recreation opportunities in underserved communities. CDPH staff are working with Parks Department staff to provide public health and equity input into the grant guidelines. Specifically, applicants are encouraged to partner with local health organizations and must explain in the application how health will be impacted for different populations. Further, points are awarded to applicants who conduct authentic, meaningful community engagement in identifying and designing proposed projects. The intended impact is to ensure that those communities facing the worst health outcomes can benefit from this program. Finally, through authentic, meaningful engagement, the intent is that the proposed park projects are meeting the community identified needs.

Impact: Local community parks are an ideal setting for promoting community health because they provide open space for residents of all ages to exercise, socialize, and connect with nature. However, in high need areas, some parks are underutilized or do not exist. The anticipated impact is that through the incorporating health and equity considerations into the application, communities with the greatest need will receive needed investment in parks.

Footnotes:

Portrait of Promise: The California Statewide Plan to Promote Health and Mental Health Equity. A Report to the Legislature and the People of California by the Office of Health Equity. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Public Health, Office of Health Equity; August 2015.

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