

Mapping the Movement for Healthy Food and Activity Environments in the United States

ORGANIZATIONAL SNAPSHOTS

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Principal authors:

Linnea Ashley, MPH

Manal J. Aboelata, MPH

Juliet Sims, RD

Sarah Adler-McDonald

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Prevention Institute is a nonprofit, national center dedicated to improving community health and well-being by building momentum for effective primary prevention. Primary prevention means taking action to build resilience and to prevent problems before they occur. The Institute's work is characterized by a strong commitment to community participation and promotion of equitable health outcomes among all social and economic groups. Since its founding in 1997, the organization has focused on injury and violence prevention, traffic safety, health disparities, nutrition and physical activity, and youth development. This, and other Prevention Institute documents, are available at no cost on our website.

221 Oak Street
Oakland, CA 94607
510.444.7738
fax 510.663.1280

www.preventioninstitute.org

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Get Moving Kern

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Consultant
Lifelong Communities Initiative

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New Orleans Food and Farm Network

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This is one in a series of 11 organizational snapshots that represent examples of compelling policy advocacy, programmatic, and environmental change efforts designed to positively impact people’s lives and livelihoods. In these snapshots we hope that the reader will recognize interest and capacity among committed advocacy groups to apply their strategies, passion, and energy to improving opportunities for healthy eating and active living in their communities. The profiles were written and produced by Prevention Institute. Funding and guidance were provided by Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Foreword

The organizational snapshots captured in the following pages present innovative efforts of 11 organizations advocating for improvements, predominantly in low-income neighborhoods and with African American and Latino residents. Each of the 11 community groups take on tough policy and environmental change issues like increasing access to healthy food, addressing safety concerns, and cultivating opportunities for walking and bicycling. In both rural settings and urban neighborhoods throughout the country, these snapshots paint a picture of pervasive challenges to healthy eating and active living and explore creative solutions to improve health and quality of life.

These 11 snapshots are part of a broader effort entitled, *Mapping the Movement for Healthy Eating and Activity Environments in the United States: A Snapshot of the Field* funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. In December 2006, Prevention Institute embarked on a national search for coalitions and organizations advocating for change in communities of color and in low-income neighborhoods. Our scan of the field involved interviews with numerous key informants which resulted in semi-structured interviews with representatives of 312 organizations. The scan

included groups working on nutrition and physical activity advocacy and related issues like food security, sustainable agriculture, and the built environment, as well as groups advocating to limit unhealthy exposures (e.g., tobacco, alcohol, and environmental toxins) and to expand human rights (e.g., labor and housing rights groups).

Of the more than 300 groups interviewed, the 11 organizations profiled in this document represent examples of compelling policy advocacy, programmatic, and environmental change efforts designed to positively impact people's lives and livelihoods. In these snapshots we hope that the reader will recognize interest and capacity among committed advocacy groups to apply their strategies, passion, and energy to improving opportunities for healthy eating and active living in their communities.

Our hope is that these organizational snapshots can be used to offer advocates, policy makers, funders, and community residents with examples of how the inertia of active, engaged organizations and residents can transform communities—make them healthier—through changes to policies, environments, and social norms.

OVERVIEW

Mapping the Movement for Healthy Food and Activity Environments in the United States: Organizational Snapshots

The organizational snapshots include a description of the organizational setting, overview of their policy advocacy and environmental change efforts, discussion of significant challenges to the work, and “quick facts” about each organization.

The “quick facts” box in the upper right-hand corner of the first page of each snapshot draws data from the Mapping Database and provides the organization’s location, policy jurisdiction (local, state or federal), policy orientation (engaged in policy, poised to do more policy work, education orientation); approach (environmental/ institutional or services/programs); strong equity focus; issue areas; policy domains; and website address.

- 1. Community Farm Alliance:** With a membership base of over 2,000, CFA spearheads policies to support family farming in rural Kentucky and creates access to healthy fresh fruits and vegetables among urban, West Louisville’s primarily African American residents through a blend of programs and policies.
- 2. Get Moving Kern and Greenfield Walking Group:** A parent-led walking group serves as the resident task force to the *Get Moving Kern* coalition and is reversing barriers to healthy eating and safe walking in their rural, predominantly Latino community of Kern County, California.
- 3. Chicagoland Bicycle Federation:** In Chicago and the surrounding region, this membership-driven organization works on Complete Streets policies, local bikeways, safe routes to school, and public events to rally for streets that will accommodate

bicyclists safely on their way to school and across the city.

- 4. Pennsylvania Hunger Action Center:** This statewide advocacy center works at the nexus of nutrition, hunger, and poverty as it coordinates a network of nutrition activists and professionals to advocate for statewide legislation to improve school nutrition, increase participation in the Food Stamp Program, and increase the minimum wage.
- 5. Piñeros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United):** In the rural town of Woodburn, Oregon with a more than 50% Latino population, the farmworkers union has developed a strong organizing and advocacy history on labor and housing issues. Now, through its 5,700+ members, the farmworkers, spouses, and children are also addressing healthy food access and physical activity to help local residents eat better and move more.
- 6. Lifelong Communities Initiative:** This program of the Atlanta Regional Commission pays special attention to the needs of seniors as it works to improve community design and support city-wide ordinances to support better walking and transportation alternatives and healthy housing for seniors.
- 7. The Food Project of Boston:** Cultivating fruits and vegetables in an urban garden and on a suburban farm leased from the city at minimal cost, youth work with *The Food Project* and participate in community-supported agriculture that brings healthy produce to low-income residents throughout Boston.

8. ***Teton Valley Trails and Pathways:*** Looking to find a balance between responsible development, land conservation, and a physical activity friendly environment, advocates and residents of this rural, sparsely populated city work together to advance local and regional policies that will guide development for years to come.
9. ***Center for Economic Security:*** Working intensively in the low-income city of Muskegon, Michigan, this relatively new organization is galvanizing support for a local, sustainable food system and hopes to get a statewide initiative on the 2010 ballot that will declare healthy, sustainable food as a right for every Michigan resident.
10. ***Pedestrians Educating Drivers on Safety:*** With a primary goal of increasing pedestrian safety throughout the Atlanta region, this organization has won policy victories and manages an innovative web-based system that allows residents to report barriers to safe walking directly to the appropriate city or county agency.
11. ***New Orleans Food and Farm Network:*** Hurricane Katrina was a recent memory when food scarcity became a frightening reality for many residents who already lacked easy access to healthy foods before the disaster. A food mapping effort started out as a short-term response to residents' need to get access to soup kitchens, grocery stores, or food pantries and now has become a tool for understanding—and filling—gaps in access to healthy foods and community gardens.

LIFELONG COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE

Local government exercises commitment of walkable communities

Even though aging-in-place sounds like a sedentary activity, it's not. The concept—that communities should provide people with housing and transportation options so they can enjoy their homes and neighborhoods as they age—is the premise for the *Lifelong Communities Initiative* (LLCI). LLCI promotes housing and transportation options, encourages healthy lifestyles, and increases access to information, resources, and services for older adults in the Atlanta metropolitan area. Their efforts are designed to improve opportunities for older adults to walk to local destinations and stay active through their senior years. LLCI's success does not just impact seniors. If communities are designed to support walking for seniors, they will be more walkable for everyone, including children, families, and the disabled.

Atlanta is experiencing an unprecedented boom in its elder population. Today there are 400,000 seniors in the Atlanta metropolitan area, and by 2030 the number of people in the area over 60 years old is expected to



SENIORS SHARE THEIR OPINIONS WITH POLICY MAKERS

QUICK FACTS

LOCATION . . . Atlanta, GA

POLICY JURISDICTION

■ Local □ State □ Federal

POLICY ORIENTATION

■ Policy □ Poised □ Education

APPROACH

■ Environmental/Institutional □ Services/Programs

EQUITY FOCUS Strong

ISSUE AREAS . . . Physical Activity

POLICY DOMAINS

■ Mass Transit
■ Healthcare
■ Land Use/Planning/Zoning

WEBSITE Nutrition

grow to 1.2 million—or one in five. The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) launched LLCI when it found that poor community design was a major barrier to older adults maintaining an independent lifestyle. As older adults age, and driving becomes harder or more dangerous, being able to walk to do errands, meet friends, or for activity can mean the difference between staying at home, or relocating to another community.

Through LLCI, ARC spearheaded the first county ordinance in the State to create senior-friendly housing. Now, other locales are adopting similar ordinances that allow for developers to include senior-friendly housing in residential areas. ARC has also worked with transit officials to adjust local transit routes and to

consider the needs of seniors in local transportation plans. LLCI emphasizes planning at the front end to influence neighborhood plans but also works to modify existing developments to accommodate seniors.

But this is not just about seniors, it is about planning communities that support walking and transportation alternatives for people of all ages. Atlanta Regional Commission sees LLCI as a good platform to create communities that promote active people at every stage. The commission has influenced elected officials and planners to consider the health needs of the population in design and development. At a 2007 summit on alternative transportation, ARC found participants eager to discuss mixed-use development, walkability, and transit options for seniors and families. Now, community stakeholders are asking to be involved, and local elected officials are championing active communities concepts. Kathryn Lawler, former employee and current consultant for Atlanta Regional Commission, attributes growing support for LLCI to their successes. “No one knows what you are talking about until you have something you have accomplished.”



SENIOR-FRIENDLY CITY PLANNING INCLUDES PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION AND HOUSING THAT ENABLE OLDER PEOPLE TO REMAIN INDEPENDENT

Policy is changing practice in the Atlanta region. As cities and counties begin adapting local policies to support senior housing and transportation alternatives, they are rezoning neighborhoods, modifying the housing stock, mapping out walking paths, planning new walking trails, and tailoring bus schedules. All of these changes together represent a cultural shift among local governments in the Atlanta metro region. Local officials are beginning to really see how to provide infrastructure and amenities that meet the health needs of the population.