

# Public Health in Land Use Planning and Community Design

Source: National Association of County & City Health Officials (NACCHO)

## Understanding the Issues

Land use, community design, and transportation planning have an impact on the health of communities in relation to diseases and injuries, as well as quality of life and well being. Environmental conditions such as air quality, ground and surface water contamination, and the re-use of brownfields (used lands where expansion or redevelopment is complicated by real or perceived environmental contamination) affect disadvantaged populations more severely, particularly given the current separation between land use planning and public health. Local public health agencies (LPHAs) can ensure that community health is emphasized throughout the planning process by becoming involved during the early stages of land use planning. In order to ensure a better quality of life and the sustainability of our communities, it is important for planners and public health officials to collaborate on healthy solutions to the environmental health problems that exist where we live, work, and play. Planning and design decisions have a tremendous impact on a wide range of public health issues, including:

### Air Quality

Asthma and other respiratory diseases are caused, in part, by poor air quality. Poor air quality is tied to pollution emitted from automobiles and other motor vehicles. In the United States, automobiles account for over 49 percent of all nitrogen oxide (NO<sub>x</sub>) emissions, which contribute to smog and lead to serious health matters.<sup>1</sup> Between 1980 and 1994, asthma rates rose by 75 percent.<sup>2</sup> People in sprawling communities drive three to four times more than those who live in efficient, well-planned areas, thus increasing vehicle emissions that contribute to poor air quality.

### Water Quality

The National Water Quality Inventory: 1996 Report to Congress identified runoff from development as one of the leading sources of water quality impairment, accounting for 46 percent of assessed estuary impairment. In the United States, wetlands are being destroyed at a rate of approximately 300,000 acres per year, much of it for new development. Wastewater also poses a serious threat to water quality. In Florida, it is estimated that onsite sewage treatment and disposal systems discharge 450 million gallons per day of partially treated, non-disinfected wastewater, which can lead to contamination of ground water supplies.

### Traffic Safety

According to the National Personal Transportation Survey, walking accounts for only five percent of trips taken and less than one percent of miles traveled, due in part to a lack of appropriate and safe options for pedestrians. Approximately 4,882 pedestrians were killed by vehicles and 78,000 injured in 2001.<sup>5</sup> A Texas study found that for three out of five disabled and elderly people, there are no sidewalks between their homes and the closest bus stop. Over 55 percent of all pedestrian deaths occur in neighborhoods, which are often designed with a bias toward cars, with no sidewalks or otherwise inadequate pedestrian accommodations.

### Physical Activity

Community design often presents barriers to physical activity, contributing to increased risk for obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and other chronic diseases. Barriers include, but are not limited to, the absence of sidewalks, heavy traffic, and high levels of crime. Today, nearly one in four Americans is obese, and at least 50 percent are overweight.<sup>7</sup> As access to recreational infrastructure may be limited, people with

disabilities often have less opportunity to engage in physical activity. People are more likely to be physically active if they can incorporate activity into their daily routine. A 1996 report from the U.S. Surgeon General determined that each year, as many as 200,000 deaths are attributable to a sedentary lifestyle.

### **Mental Health**

According to the Human Environment-Research Lab, studies have shown that exposure to greenspace helps to foster an increased sense of community, and also lessens the effects of chronic mental fatigue, which reduces violence and aggressive behavior. A Cornell University study found that children whose families relocated to areas with more greenspace experienced an increase in cognitive functioning. Lack of accessibility, such as absence of ramps and narrow doorways, can contribute to an increase in isolation for the elderly and people with disabilities. Increased commuting time has been linked with physical and stress-related health problems. It is estimated that for each additional 10 minutes of driving time, there is a 10 percent decline in civic involvement.

### **Hazardous Materials**

Hazardous materials are transported, stored, manufactured, or disposed of in many communities. Often, zoning and environmental regulations do not provide for the separation of incompatible land uses, like placing housing near areas zoned for use or storage of hazardous materials. In addition, hazardous waste sites continue to be a significant concern. The Environmental Protection Agency determined that one in every four children in the United States lives within one mile of a National Priorities List hazardous waste site. The United Nations Environment Programme links exposure to heavy metals with certain cancers, kidney damage, and developmental retardation.

### **Social Justice**

Evidence demonstrates that environmental hazards, air pollution, heat-related morbidity and mortality, traffic fatalities, and substandard housing disproportionately affect low-income and minority populations. Environmental Protection Agency data

shows that Hispanics are more likely than Whites to live in air pollution non-attainment areas. Asthma mortality is approximately three times higher among Blacks than it is among Whites. As neighborhoods undergo gentrification, people of a lower socioeconomic status are pushed to the fringes, limiting their access to social services. A lack of public transportation options often exacerbates the problem and leaves minority populations disproportionately affected by less access to quality housing, healthy air, good quality water, and adequate transportation.

### **Role of LPHAs**

Because most land use planning occurs at the local level, it is essential that LPHAs become more integrated in the planning process in order to address and prevent unfavorable outcomes for public health. LPHAs must assume a diverse and proactive approach in order to be successful in this role, including:

- Forging partnerships between LPHAs and local planning and transportation officials in order to bring health to the planning table.
- Using data to arm and inform stakeholders and decisionmakers, substituting national data if local data is unavailable.
- Expanding the role of LPHAs in commenting on development plans.
- Electing health officials to planning boards and other community positions.
- Attending planning meetings regularly.
- Serving as information conduits, keeping abreast of current processes and policies, and disseminating information to community members.
- Adopting local resolutions on health and land use/transportation planning

# Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

Source: Office of Family Assistance, Administration for Children and Families  
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## MISSION STATEMENT

The Office of Family Assistance administers the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. TANF provides assistance and work opportunities to needy families by granting States the federal funds and wide flexibility to develop and implement their own welfare programs.

## What is the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program (TANF)?

TANF is a block grant program to help move recipients into work and turn welfare into a program of temporary assistance. Under the welfare reform legislation of 1996, TANF replaced the old welfare programs known as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program and the Emergency Assistance (EA) program. The law ended federal entitlement to assistance and instead created TANF as a block grant that provides States and tribes federal funds each year. These funds cover benefits, administrative expenses, and services targeted to needy families.

## MAJOR GOAL

### The four purposes of TANF are:

- assisting needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes
- reducing the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work and marriage
- preventing out-of-wedlock pregnancies
- encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

## Highlights of TANF

### Work Requirements:

- Recipients (with few exceptions) must work as soon as they are job ready or no later than two years after coming on assistance.
- Single parents are required to participate in work activities for at least 30 hours per week. Two-parent families must participate in work activities 35 or 55 hours a week, depending upon circumstances.
- Failure to participate in work requirements can result in a reduction or termination of benefits to the family.
- States cannot penalize single parents with a child under six for failing to meet work requirements if they cannot find adequate child care.
- States, in FY 2004, have to ensure that 50 percent of all families and 90 percent of two-parent families are participating in work activities. If a state reduces its caseload, without restricting eligibility, it can receive a caseload reduction credit. This credit reduces the minimum participation rates the state must achieve.

### Work Activities – Activities that count toward a state's participation rates (some restrictions may apply):

- unsubsidized or subsidized employment
- on-the-job training
- work experience
- community service
- job search – not to exceed 6 total weeks and no more than 4 consecutive weeks
- vocational training – not to exceed 12 months
- job skills training related to work
- satisfactory secondary school attendance
- providing child care services to individuals who are participating in community service.

**Five-Year Time Limit:**

- Families with an adult who has received federally funded assistance for a total of five years (or less at state option) are not eligible for cash aid under the TANF program.
- States may extend assistance beyond 60 months to not more than 20 percent of their caseload. They may also elect to provide assistance to families beyond 60 months using state-only funds or Social Services Block Grants.

**State Maintenance of Effort Requirement (MOE):**

- The TANF block grant has an annual cost-sharing requirement for States, referred to as maintenance of effort or MOE.
- Every fiscal year each state must spend a certain minimum amount of its own money to help eligible families in ways consistent with the TANF program.

**Penalties**

- The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) may reduce a state's block grant if it fails to do any of the following:
  - satisfy work requirements
  - comply with the five-year limit on assistance
  - meet the state's Contingency fund MOE requirement
  - reduce recipient grants for refusing to participate in work activities without good cause
  - maintain assistance when a single custodial parent with a child under six can not obtain child care
  - submit required data reports
  - comply with paternity establishment and child support enforcement requirements
  - participate in the Income and Eligibility Verification System
  - repay a federal loan on time
  - use funds appropriately
  - replace federal penalty reductions with additional state funds.

**Teen Parent Live-at-Home and Stay-in-School Requirement:**

- Unmarried minor parents must participate in educational and training activities and live with a responsible adult or in an adult-supervised setting in order to receive assistance.
- States are responsible for assisting in locating adult-supervised settings for teens who can not live at home.

**Job Subsidies:**

- The law allows States to create jobs by taking money that is used for welfare checks and using it to create community service jobs, provide income subsidies, or provide hiring incentives for potential employers.

**Waivers:**

- States that received approval for welfare reform waivers before January 1, 1997, have the option to operate their cash assistance program under some or all of these waivers until the waivers expire.

**Bonuses:**

- The law includes provisions for two bonuses that may be awarded to States and territories in addition to their basic TANF block grant.
- TANF's High Performance Bonus program provides cash awards to States for high relative achievement on certain measures related to the goals and purposes of the TANF program.
- The Department of Health and Human Services is required to award a Bonus to Reward Decrease in Illegitimacy Ratio to as many as five States (and three territories, if eligible) that achieve the largest decrease in out-of-wedlock births without experiencing an increase in their abortion rates above 1995 levels.