

Building Healthy Communities

An initiative of the Cardiovascular Health, Nutrition and Physical Activity Section,
Michigan Department of Community Health
In partnership with Michigan State University Extension



Background

Chronic diseases account for 7 out of every 10 deaths and adversely affect the quality of life of more than 90 million Americans. They also increase demand for medical care and social services and cost billions of dollars annually in medical expenditures and lost productivity (Fig. 1). In Michigan, rates of chronic disease such as cardiovascular disease, obesity and Type 2 diabetes are higher than national averages (CDC BRFSS 2006).

Unhealthy eating habits, physical inactivity, and tobacco exposure are the three primary modifiable risk factors that contribute to chronic disease. Michigan Department of Community Health's (MDCH) approach to combating chronic disease is to address these behaviors and the multiple factors that influence them, such as family, workplaces, and neighborhood design, using a socio-ecological approach (Fig. 2). Emphasis is placed on conducting initiatives that focus on the levels of the model which address policies and environments. These types of changes can affect large percentages of the population and make it easier for Michigan citizens to eat healthfully, be physically active, and not smoke.

Building Healthy Communities Project

The Building Healthy Communities Project is a 4-year competitive grant program. Local health departments are funded, trained and provided technical assistance to plan and implement evidence-based policy and environmental changes that support health, such as opening farmers markets and building walking and biking trails, through a strategic process (Fig. 3).

During the second year of funding for this project in 2006, MDCH partnered with Michigan State University Extension. Through this partnership, MDCH was able to secure \$1 of federal money from USDA Food Stamp Nutrition Education (FSNE) Program for every \$1 in state or local match put towards the project for nutrition education. The money derived from USDA is used to fund county extension agencies and health departments to provide nutrition and physical activity education which target the individual and interpersonal levels of the Social Ecological Model.

Fig. 1 The Cost of Unhealthy Lifestyles

- More than 25% of US health care costs are related to physical inactivity, overweight and obesity.
Anderson, et al. Preventing Chronic Disease 2005:2;4.
- Adult obesity costs \$2.9 billion in Michigan.
Michigan Behavior Risk Factor Survey, 2005



Fig. 2 The Social Ecological Model

Fig. 3 Project Timeline

Year One (2005): Strategic Planning

- Form or engage an existing health coalition of multidisciplinary partners.
- Complete an environmental assessment tool to determine the assets, resources and needs of the community. (www.mihealthtools.org).
- Create a strategic 3-year action plan to increase healthy eating and physical activity and reduce tobacco use through evidence-based policy and environmental change strategies.

Years Two–Four (2006-2008): Implementation

- Implement changes from action plan.
- Build project sustainability in the community.

Building Healthy Communities



Results

- Seven local health departments and eight county extension agencies were funded by the project. Funded agencies cover 25 counties in Michigan.
- More than 283 organizations have partnered at the local level.
- Projects have reached more than 284,000 residents.
- With the funding provided by this project, local coalitions have leveraged more than \$1.4 million in additional funding to support their work.

Physical Activity

- 11 trails covering 58.6 miles were created or enhanced with benches, lighting and signage.
- 7 parks were enhanced with items such as new equipment, benches, and lighting.
- 14,000 walking maps were provided to residents.
- 129 community fitness classes were conducted.

Healthy Eating

- 4 new farmers market locations opened. All markets have ability to process Electronic Benefits Transfer transactions for food stamp recipients.
- 7 new school and community gardens were created.
- 5,000 Senior Project FRESH coupon books were distributed to low-income seniors to redeem for fresh fruits and vegetables.
- 2,129 healthy food taste testings were provided to youth and families to encourage them to try healthy foods.
- 100 nutrition education classes were provided to families to teach them about healthy lifestyles.

Tobacco

- 6 counties have passed clean indoor air ordinances.
- Several counties have designated trails, beaches and workplaces smoke-free.

Conclusion And Next Steps

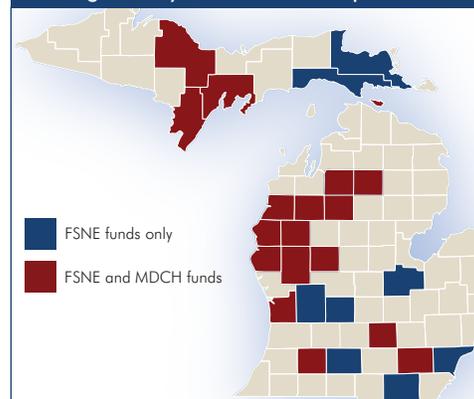
Overall, the Building Healthy Communities Project has achieved significant success in creating and enhancing places for Michigan citizens to enjoy healthy lifestyles. To continue this success in the future, Michigan Department of Community Health will:

1. Continue to build the capacity of local public health to be leaders of healthy change in their communities through providing training and technical assistance.
2. Collaborate with other projects and programs at the state and local levels to coordinate and strategically utilize scarce resources.
3. Explore alternative funding options to expand this project to more Michigan counties.

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Fig. 4 Counties that receive funding from the Building Healthy Communities Project.



New healthy food place: Quality Dairy convenience store in Lansing, MI.

This store expanded shelf space for, and variety of, fruits and vegetables.



Non-motorized trail: Zeeland, MI

The Northside Pathway, a 1.5 mile trail adjacent to an industrial park, was completed in 2007. This trail provides walking opportunities for the more than 12,000 employees working in the area.