

Healthy Communities Collaboration

Denise Nelson, P.E., ENV SP, LEED AP

The American Public Health Association (APHA) called for a collaboration among public works, planning, engineering, architecture, forestry, and other professionals to create healthy communities. The [call to action](#) (spring 2017) is supported by professional societies representing nearly half a million professionals that recognize the impact of community layout, public spaces, and buildings on public health. Data indicate that the design of the built environment has increased rates of obesity, diabetes, asthma, heart disease, and mental health issues. All supporters recommend intentional community design including multi-use pathways and complete streets, transit options, tree canopies, natural stormwater management, and other techniques to reduce the rates of chronic diseases. The call to action recommendations include creating collaborations, establishing measurable health objectives, creating policies/systems to promote health, and outreach.

APHA plans to invite APWA to engage in the next phase of the effort. In the interim, resources are already freely available from a number of public health organizations and the supporting professional societies.

- The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) summarize statistics and resources related to chronic diseases, health risks, and associated costs.
- The [County Health Rankings and Roadmap website](#) offers reports, interactive maps, rankings, and many more resources on health data and demographics.
- The [Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation](#) created an interactive map where you can explore health trends at the county level.
- The National Association of Counties provides resources in their [Healthy Counties Initiative](#) including an interactive map with health data and demographics.
- The [Metrics for Planning Healthy Communities](#) website provides Logic models to guide planning and a search tool to bring you to reliable measures.
- The Surgeon General created the “[Step It Up!](#)” campaign to promote walking and walkable communities. The website provides multiple resources.
- The Virginia Municipal League in a strategic partnership with the Healthy Eating Active Living Cities & Towns Campaign created the [Healthy Eating Active Living \(HEAL\) Cities & Towns Campaign](#) providing technical assistance, training, and grants. Over 50 jurisdictions in Maryland and Virginia have adopted resolutions and other policies to shape their communities into places where it is easier for residents and employees to make healthy choices about physical activity and nutrition.
- The American Planning Association offers a comprehensive toolkit for [Planning & Zoning for Health in the Built Environment](#). They also offer a toolkit for integrating [Health Impact Assessments](#) into the planning practice. APA collaborates with APHA on [Plan4Health](#) to build local capacity to address health goals using planning strategies. They also offer these reports and resources: [Planning & Zoning for Health in the Built Environment](#), [Benefits of Street Scale Features for Walking and Biking](#), [Planning for Public Health](#), and [Healthy Communities through Collaboration](#).

- One of the three pillars of the National Recreation and Parks Association is health and wellness as noted in the position statement [The Role of Parks and Recreation in Health and Wellness](#). They offer the [Making the Case: Parks and Health Toolkit](#) with fact sheets, Infographics, PowerPoint slides, Success stories, and Testimonials. They also offer three online calculators: [NRPA Park Values Calculator](#), [Water Values Calculator](#), and [NRPA Rectangular Field Value Calculator](#).
- The American Public Health Association addresses public health topics including climate change and environmental health and promotes the hashtag [#ClimateChangesHealth](#). APHA supported Transportation for America in developing a [range of strategies](#) for metro area planning agencies. They also supported the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on the development of a simple-to-use [Transportation and Health Tool](#). Additional resources are on their website for [Active Transportation](#).
- The Urban Land Institute offers a variety of articles including [Intersections: Health and the Built Environment](#). The toolkit [Building Healthy Corridors: Transforming Urban and Suburban Arterials into Thriving Places](#) includes the report, strategy and resource guide, audit checklist, draft agenda for local workshop, draft agenda for national study visit, and case studies.
- The American Institute of Architects launched a design and health initiative and teamed with the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture to establish the [Design & Health Research Consortium](#) to support university-led research. The University of Virginia, School of Architecture's project examines the impact of green infrastructure on stress mitigation and protection from chronic disease. They also support two knowledge communities, [Academy of Architecture for Health](#) and [Design for Aging](#), which have libraries of case studies.
- One of the three key issues for the American Society of Landscape Architects is "Health + Design". They offer hundreds of free [research studies, news articles, and case studies](#), organized by adult and children health topics.

Author Bio:

[Denise Nelson](#) is an Environmental Engineer with [The Berkley Group](#). She serves on the chapter Sustainability Committee and is a local expert on the [Envision](#) rating system for sustainable infrastructure. She also manages the chapter Twitter feed (@APWAMidAtlantic).