Indiana Plan4Health Final Report
Plan4Health

Plan4Health, a three-year initiative intended to strengthen the relationships between planning and public health in communities across the United States, was supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and led by the American Planning Association’s (APA’s) Planning and Community Health Center. Thirty-five coalitions made up two cohorts over the first two years of the Plan4Health initiative, and worked within their communities to increase access to healthy foods or to increase opportunities for active living for community members.

Two coalitions here in Indiana – one based in the City of Columbus and one based in Indianapolis – were part of cohort one and were anchored by APA-Indiana and the Indiana Public Health Association. The City of Columbus’s coalition work was led by Columbus Regional Health’s Healthy Communities Initiative and the City of Columbus-Bartholomew County Planning Department. The coalition’s focus was to bridge the gap between policy adoption and implementation as it relates to the built environment. Three distinct strategies to improve pedestrian access across the community were the crux of the city’s work and included:

• Analyzing and designing bicycle and pedestrian crossing treatments at three key intersections along a specified segment of the Columbus People Trail System that connect people to important area parks;
• Exploring the policies and guidelines utilized by the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) when designing bicycle and pedestrian crossings at state highway intersections, and engaging in a dialogue with INDOT about how the City can become more involved in the design of intersection improvements in the future; and
• Launching a broad public awareness campaign that highlighted the importance of designing and building the community in a way that promotes physical activity as part of a daily routine. You can learn more about the City of Columbus’s work at gohealthycolumbus.org.

Columbus, Indiana: Walking towards Greatness

In Indianapolis, coalition work was led by Health by Design, a coalition of diverse partners who work to ensure that communities throughout Indiana have neighborhoods, public spaces, and transportation infrastructure that promote physical activity and healthy living. Indianapolis’s Plan4Health project aimed at making Indianapolis-Marion County safer and more accessible for pedestrians. To do this, the coalition launched WalkWays: Moving Indy Forward, an initiative to make Indianapolis more walkable and to get more people walking. The WalkWays initiative included the creation of a comprehensive pedestrian program for Marion County and the development of the city’s first pedestrian master plan that helped to promote community walkability and walking. The plan was adopted by the Metropolitan Development Commission in May 2016. More information can be found at indywalkways.org.

Indianapolis/Marion County Pedestrian Plan

Acknowledgements

The Indiana Planners4Health Task Force included the individuals below, listed with their affiliation during the project period:

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For more information about the Indiana Planners4Health project, email info@hbdin.org.
Planners 4 Health

Planners4Health was the final iteration of Plan4Health and focused efforts on integrating and institutionalizing health at APA. It was designed to go beyond place-based projects – working in a specific neighborhood, city, or county – to bring a focus to health at the chapter level of APA. Indiana’s Planners4Health initiative began in November of 2016 when the Indiana Chapter of the American Planning Association was awarded additional grant funding from APA. Project goals were to 1) Integrate planning and public health throughout the APA-IN chapter and to 2) Disseminate findings and lessons of the City of Columbus and Indianapolis/Marion County’s Plan4Health projects.

The Planners4Health project deliverables included the assembly of a task force, completion of a needs assessment, hosting a roundtable, and reporting out on results. The task force, made up of both planning and public health professionals, alike, played the role of project management and met monthly. Further, the task force was responsible for project activities, participating in monthly webinars, and monthly peer calls with other Planners4Health teams from around the country. Finally, the task force was responsible for ongoing communication both within the task force and with relevant stakeholders from around the state.

The needs assessment, discussed in further detail below, included an online survey and focus groups. The roundtable, also described in detail below, was held in Indianapolis in June of 2017. Based on assessment findings and roundtable recommendations, the Indiana Planners4Health task force identified more specific action steps for future work in Indiana. The tailored outcomes – which include structural, policy, and place-based components – are discussed in further detail in the Next Steps section.

Background

Building a culture of health in Indiana is critical for its residents. Currently, Indiana has low state health rankings, a high infant mortality rate, and high levels of obesity and chronic disease. Further, the combination of high rates of smoking, low levels of public health spending, and a general lack of community awareness of work around these issues highlights the importance of planners and public health professionals working together and prioritizing efforts in this area.

Work at the intersection of planning and public health is already underway in Indiana. In communities around the state, efforts are being made in areas such as community design and land use, wastewater and storm water, environmental health, economic development, transportation, food systems, parks and green spaces, health and human services, housing, school siting, and safety and crime prevention.

To gain a more complete understanding of what this work actually looks like, a needs assessment was developed. An online survey and focus groups addressed important questions for planning and public health professionals. Further, a roundtable was held in Indianapolis and was designed to be a space where attendees could share information and resources about planning and public health work in the state.

Needs Assessment

Purpose

The goal of the Indiana Planners4Health needs assessment – which included both an online survey and two focus groups – was to better understand what is currently happening at the intersection of planning and public health in Indiana. The assessment was designed to capture the people, places, and organizations involved in this work. The task force aimed to identify needed trainings, technical assistance, and tools needed to strengthen the relationship between the two disciplines. Lastly, the needs assessment was intended to help task force members define why this work is important.

Development

After identifying the goals of the needs assessment, Planners4Health task force members began work to craft questions for survey respondents and focus group participants. Initial research was conducted to identify similar surveys utilized previously from around the country. Task force members drew from these existing surveys to design a twenty-four question online survey and to determine a framework for a discussion with focus group participants.

Process

The online survey was disseminated beginning in April 2017 and was open to respondents through June. The survey was pushed out through multiple networks including APA-IN chapter members, Prosperity Indiana, the APA-IN listserv, public health nurses, the American Institute of Architects-Indiana, the American Society of Landscape Architects, the Indiana School of Public and Environmental Affairs, the Indiana Rural Health Association, the Indiana University Bloomington School of Public Health, and the Indiana Association of Cities and Towns. Just over 460 respondents participated in the survey.

Two focus groups were conducted over the course of the Planners4Health grant period. At the APA-IN Spring Professional Development Conference on March 23, 2017, planners from around the state participated in a facilitated discussion led by task force members. Additionally, in late June, water experts from around the state convened in Indianapolis to discuss issues related to drinking water, wastewater, and storm water.

Findings

Responses from the online survey and focus groups helped Planners4Health task force members gain a more complete understanding of the intersection of planning and public health in Indiana. From bicycle and pedestrian planning to the design of urban gardens, and from flood preparedness to Safe Routes to School programs, many efforts that are bridging the gap between planning and public health are underway. The needs assessment also helped to determine what factors help this type of work succeed. Respondents identified strong relationships and partnerships, grassroots efforts, and dedicated, paid staff as contributing to overall success of these projects. On the contrary, funding, lack of understanding and interest, and competing priorities were all cited as challenges to work at the intersection of planning and public health. Finally, from the needs assessment, it was determined that respondents, both planners and public health professionals alike, are interested in additional trainings, tools, and technical assistance that would accelerate coordination between the two disciplines in work around the state.
Roundtable

The Planners4Health roundtable was hosted on Thursday, June 29, from 9 a.m. - 2 p.m., in Indianapolis. More than 65 partners from across the state were invited to participate. Agenda items included an introduction to Plan4Health and Planners4Health, a needs assessment overview, peer exchanges, and a facilitated discussion. Participants included, but were not limited to, staff from universities (e.g. Ball State and Indiana University), students, planning consultants, representatives from APA-IN and the Indiana Public Health Association, YMCA employees, and many more.

During the peer sharing segment of the roundtable, participants were separated into small groups and asked to answer a series of questions:

- What work have you been involved in at the intersection of planning and public health?
- What helped the project(s) be successful?
- What challenges were faced?

A representative from each subgroup then reported out to all of the participants.

In addition to peer sharing, a portion of the day was reserved for a facilitated discussion intended to encourage participants to brainstorm ways to integrate planning and public health work moving forward. A series of questions were asked, subgroups discussed the questions, and a representative from each subgroup reported out to the group at large. Questions included the following:

- How do we best disseminate and translate the work that is already happening?
- What is needed to promote/ incentivize/ ensure planning and public health work together?
- Assuming resources, what strategies to connect and coordinate planning and public health should be pursued in the next one to two years? Three to five years?

Groups were asked to share ideas that surfaced as most important and participants were asked to dot vote so that task force members could identify and prioritize strategies.

The following short- and long-term strategies surfaced to the top during the dot voting process:

Short-Term Strategies:
- Get Health by Design on agendas of relevant state conferences (e.g. APA-IN)
- Provide education on health indicators related to planning
- Develop a curated, supported repository/website for relevant materials to live
- Develop a framework for communities to work together and model through local convening

Long-Term Strategies:
- Require a health element for comprehensive plans in state statute
- Require training for decision makers
- Influence funding criteria at the state level to promote health in planning

Next Steps

Promoting and planning for healthy communities requires the inclusion of health in non-traditional sectors. Through the Planners4Health initiative, planning and public health professionals have begun to address gaps between the two disciplines, and further, have been able to think about ways to develop and advance cross-sector partnerships. Planners4Health project activities – an online survey, focus groups, and a roundtable led to the identification of five strategies to develop, improve, and, in some cases, strengthen the relationship between planners and public health professionals in the state. Those activities are listed and described below.

- Developing both a health and a water chapter in the Indiana Citizen Planner Guide
- Identifying opportunities for collaboration between planning and public health at academic institutions
- Creating a tool that demonstrates how to effectively include health in comprehensive planning
- Crafting a model for a leadership academy for planning and public health
- Investigating health in all policies as it relates to planning
- Introducing a health module at APA-IN ‘Nitty Gritty’ training sessions

Indiana Citizen Planner Guide: The Indiana Citizen Planner Guide is an online publication produced by APA-IN. This series is specific to Indiana and provides training materials for citizen planners, neighborhood organizations, and plan commission members, among others. The intent of developing a health chapter is to introduce citizen planners to the idea of incorporating health into the work that they do as a part of the basic planning processes that they are involved in. It is meant to be a broad overview, similar to the other chapters in the guide. Similarly, the development of a water chapter would encourage users to think about water issues in light of health impacts and outcomes.
Collaboration between Academic Institutions: As planners and public health professionals receive training and education in traditional school settings in Indiana, little curriculum, if any, addresses how the two disciplines influence one another. Because of this, the Indiana Planners4Health task force is interested in academic partnerships to connect planning and public health. More specifically, the task force is interested in learning what others are doing around the country—at the university level—to bring the two disciplines together. Further, the task force will identify opportunities for collaboration and potential partners at academic institutions in and around the state.

Health in Comprehensive Planning: The task force recognizes that including health in comprehensive planning is important, if not critical. While some evidence of health in master plans exists, it is typically seen in local bicycle, pedestrian, parks, and trails plans; and the task force is interested in how to better routinely integrate health into other, broader planning efforts. Again, researching the way others across the country have approached health in comprehensive planning will be a practical first step. The task force's aim is to develop a tool or resource that will be made available to planners that demonstrate how to incorporate health into their comprehensive planning process.

Leadership Academy: Another strategy that the Indiana task force intends to pursue is developing a model for a leadership academy for planning and public health. It will be a priority for the task force to identify a target audience, costs of the academy, and staff capacity. The hope is that the creation of a leadership academy will be an avenue to further develop and advance partnerships at the intersection of planning and public health.

Health in all Policies: An emerging topic, health in all policies, is defined by the Public Health Institute as "a collaborative approach to improving the health of all people by incorporating health considerations into decision-making across sectors and policy areas." The Indiana task force is interested in this idea as it relates to planning. The objective of the task force is to package together information about health in all policies so that we can begin conversations with communities in and around Indiana about the approach.

Nitty Gritty: Finally, the task force intends to investigate how a health module might make sense within the APA-IN 'Nitty Gritty' training workshop. These workshops are specific to Indiana and provide the basics of local land use planning and regulation. Members of the task force recognize that including a health component into the workshop curriculum could prove beneficial.

Closing

The Planners4Health initiative was beneficial in Indiana, as it helped to build relationships, allowed a better understanding of the connections between planning and public health, and institutionalized changes that bridge gaps between the two disciplines. Health by Design, the Indiana Public Health Association, and the Indiana Chapter of the American Planning Association remain committed to partnering on implementation of strategies that will further foster connections and collaboration between planners and public health professionals around the state.

Resources

Health by Design: http://www.healthbydesignonline.org/
Indiana Chapter of the American Planning Association: http://www.indianaplanning.org/
Indiana Public Health Association: https://ipha.com/
Plan4Health: http://plan4health.us/
Planners4Health: https://www.planning.org/nationalcenters/health/planners4health/