

Introducing the Healthy Eating Active Living Convergence Partnership

*working together to create healthy people in healthy places
through policy and environmental change*

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for the Healthy Eating Active Living Convergence Partnership

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In 2006, a collaboration of funders came together to create the Healthy Eating Active Living Convergence Partnership, with the shared goal of changing policies and environments to better achieve the vision of healthy people living in healthy places. The steering committee includes representatives from The California Endowment, Kaiser Permanente, Nemours, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention serve as critical technical advisors on the committee. The work of the Partners is supported by PolicyLink, a national research and action institute devoted to advancing economic and social equity. The Convergence Partnership supports multifield equity-focused efforts to create environments that support healthy eating and active living.

The Big Picture: Our Environments Determine Our Health

The research is clear: Where children and families live, learn, work, and play affects their health. People thrive when they earn living wages and live in communities with parks and playgrounds, grocery stores selling nutritious food, and neighbors who know one another. Without a healthy environment, people are more likely to suffer from obesity or one of the many chronic diseases plaguing the United States: diabetes, asthma, and heart disease.

Preventing disease, then, means creating environments that surround children and families—neighborhoods, schools, childcare centers, and workplaces—that support healthy decisions. It requires change in both the food environment—including how food is grown, processed, distributed, and sold—and the physical environment—from how neighborhoods are built to the transportation systems that serve them.

As concerns about healthy environments grow, professional boundaries are becoming fluid. Health professionals are being joined by others—for example, developers and city planners who are considering health as they plan for transportation and neighborhood development, and by those concerned about agriculture and the state of the food system. Advocates from various fields are beginning to see how their work can enhance progress in other fields and can improve health overall. For example, in the past, advocates for open space might have limited their arguments about the importance of public parks to the value of preserving green space and health advocates might have limited their focus to health care. Now they may work together in a broader coalition, highlighting the potential health benefits of additional parks for active living. As their interests and actions converge, advocates are cultivating connections across all the environments that influence health and are beginning to see how their efforts can foster policy and environmental changes that help families and children lead healthier lives.

Food environments determine health.

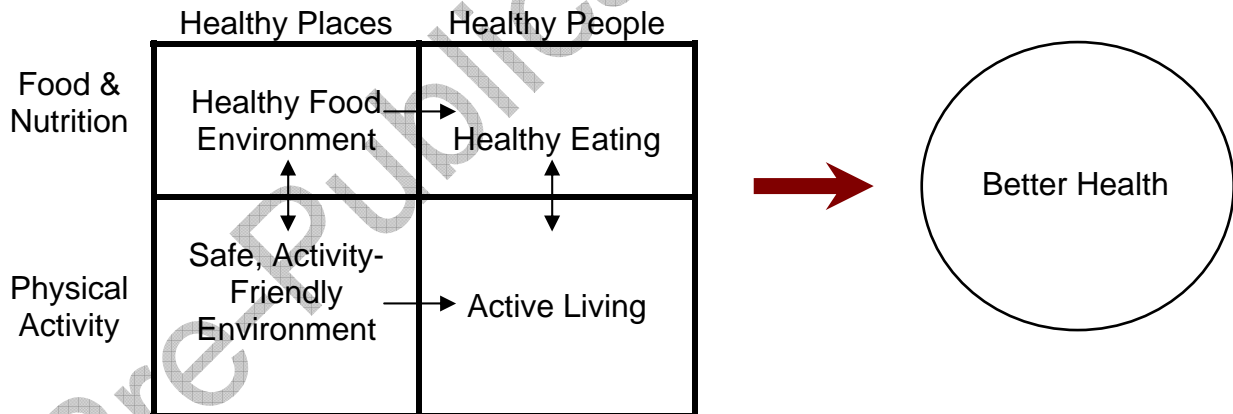
Residents' access to healthy affordable foods largely depends on their food environment, which includes where children and families make food purchases and food decisions. Strategies that are working to remove barriers to healthy eating include school-based programs that provide students with nutritious meals and snacks, new financing options for supermarket development, and support of farmers' markets and community gardens.

Physical environments determine health.

Neighborhoods, schools, transportation systems, parks, open space, homes, and workplaces create the physical environment that can make it easier or more challenging for families and children to be physically active. Are there parks nearby? Are there sidewalks? Do residents feel safe enough to even venture out of their homes or to allow their children outdoors? Diverse efforts are underway including planning, land use, zoning and sprawl control initiatives that support active living to build and sustain a healthy physical environment.

As illustrated in the Healthy People-Healthy Places Framework, physical and food environments are inextricably linked, and together they can foster or inhibit our ability to eat well and be active.

Healthy People-Healthy Places Framework



The Healthy People Healthy-Places Framework has important implications for how to improve food and activity environments, including which environments need changing the most and the process for creating that change.

To improve food and activity environments, existing disparities must be addressed.

Not all communities are created equally when it comes to opportunities for healthy eating and active living. Research shows that low-income communities and communities of color have fewer grocery stores that stock healthy fresh

foods and are more likely to be unsafe for children to walk to school or play outside. Communities that do not provide residents the opportunity to make healthy choices are disproportionately affected by the obesity epidemic. Residents who live in a predominantly unhealthy environment also are more likely to suffer from diabetes, asthma, heart disease, and high blood pressure. These underlying inequities must be addressed by those who are working to create healthy places for healthy people.

The Convergence Partnership: Fostering Healthy People in Healthy Places

Converging to learn, converging to act.

In the fall of 2005, Kaiser Permanente, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation initiated the Healthy Eating Active Living Convergence Project to learn more about how diverse fields are working together to improve the health of people and places across the country, and to identify strategic opportunities for collaborative action.

The Convergence Project set out to learn how multifield, equity-focused change could be promoted in communities and institutions. Surveys, interviews, and listening sessions were conducted with organizations and funders working to advance healthy eating and active living. Included were: web-based surveys of 581 national, regional, and local organizations and funders from 47 states; more than 100 telephone or in-person key informant interviews with leaders in the field; and an examination of more than 100 websites and reports. The Convergence Project launched a dialogue among more than 100 leaders in Bethesda, Maryland, in June 2006, to discuss the findings and create a strategy for action.

The Convergence Partnership's vision is *Healthy People in Healthy Places*.

This vision will be realized when:

- Safe neighborhoods, communities, and buildings support physical activity as part of everyday life.
- Fresh, local, and healthy food is available and affordable in all communities and neighborhoods.
- Healthy foods and beverages are promoted in grocery and other food stores, restaurants, and entertainment venues.
- Schools offer and promote only healthy foods and beverages to students.
- Schools promote healthy physical activities and incorporate them throughout the day, including before and after school.
- Workplaces and employers offer and promote access to healthy foods and beverages and opportunities for physical activity.
- Healthcare organizations and providers promote healthy eating and active living in their own institutional policies and in their clinical practices.
- Government and the private sector support and promote healthy eating and active living environments.
- Organizations, institutions, and individuals that influence the information and entertainment environments share responsibility for and act responsibly to promote healthy eating and active living.
- Childcare organizations, including preschool, after-school, and early childhood settings, offer and promote only healthy foods and beverages to children and provide sufficient opportunities for, and promote, physical activity.

As a result of the Bethesda meeting, The Healthy Eating Active Living Convergence Partnership was created to engage funders in a collaborative effort to foster and sustain healthy environments. The steering committee of the Healthy Eating Active Living Convergence Partnership includes The California Endowment, Kaiser Permanente, Nemours, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention serve as critical technical advisors on the committee. In 2007, PolicyLink began working with the Partnership as the Program Director, to help develop and implement a strategic plan, engage with others in the field, and further its overall vision.

The Convergence Partnership's core values are equity and social justice.

The message from the field was clear: addressing, reducing and eliminating inequities is essential to changing community environments and must be a high priority. Members of the communities who suffer most from unhealthy environments—largely low-income communities of color—must be included as part of any change effort. Their voices and leadership are crucial in identifying the changes that are most needed, in advocating for those changes, and in sustaining the changes over time. Consequently, the Convergence Partnership will support activities and strategies to improve the places most affected by these disparities and ensure that community residents are partners in the process from the beginning.

The Convergence Partnership focuses on changing environments.

Providing opportunities for healthy eating and active living is essential to achieving the vision of healthy people and places. For example, can families purchase affordable, quality foods close to home? Are healthy foods available to children at school? Is it safe for families and children to walk to school, play in parks, or bicycle in the neighborhood? The Convergence Partnership learned that environments influence health both directly and indirectly by shaping norms and culture and that policy and practice influence environments in organizations and in communities.

That simple equation is complicated, however, by the fact that some environments encompass a broad range of overlapping and interrelated geographies, systems, and fields. Policies in one field can influence outcomes in another. For instance, a municipality might enact a tax or zoning policy to encourage supermarkets to locate in underserved communities, but if transportation is inadequate, the new supermarket may fail. A successful bond measure might generate revenues to build parks; but if the neighborhoods are dangerous, the parks may not get used. A youth group may convince local store managers to create healthy check-out aisles so children will not pester their parents for junk food. But if the corporation has contracts that mandate certain candies at every register, the local store manager will not be able to comply.

Neighborhoods, schools, industry, policymakers, foundations and families must coordinate their efforts to create healthy environments.

The Convergence Partnership strategies encourage policy and organizational change.

Changing policy is often the most effective way to implement and sustain environmental change. Such change requires attention and action from decision makers—elected officials, agency officials, institutional leaders, and other policymakers—as well as the constituencies that influence them, including community residents and leaders. Consequently, policies and practices that give rise to healthy environments must be identified, advocated for, and enacted within community-based organizations and throughout multiple levels of government.

Based on its initial findings, the Convergence Partnership will pursue four core strategies to create environments that foster good health:

1. Build support for environmental and policy changes that promote healthy eating and active living.
2. Promote and support coordination and connections within the healthy eating and active living field.
3. Optimize and increase investments to expand the intensity, reach, and number of community-based initiatives focused on environmental and policy change to increase opportunities for healthy eating and active living.
4. Foster market-based change so that healthy food and opportunities for daily physical activity are available, affordable, safe, convenient, and attractively presented and marketed to all residents.

These four strategies interact, and the success of each is tied to the success of the others. So, while environmental change clearly requires changes in policy and organizational practice, it cannot happen without an engaged and a connected field, investments that help to spark and support momentum, and a marketplace that changes as implementation proceeds. The Healthy Eating Active Living Convergence Partnership's strategic plan, developed with PolicyLink, accounts for this need by targeting its activities within and across the different fields and geographic locations with actions designed to:

- promote multifield policy, advocacy, networking, and mobilization;
- foster leadership;
- move the evidence base forward;
- employ the best in strategic communications; and
- leverage the resources of the Convergence Partnership's own and other foundations.

In addition, these **strategies must be pursued simultaneously** across the various fields that affect the food and physical environments. To better understand this need, the Healthy Eating Active Living Convergence Partnership asked Prevention Institute to compile policies that might be pursued to promote its vision of healthy people in healthy places. The resulting document, “Promising Strategies for Creating Healthy Eating and Active Living Environments,” presents strategies that have been suggested and reviewed by leaders from diverse fields so each strategy’s political viability, potential impact, and evidence base can be considered.

The Healthy Eating Active Living Convergence Partnership will publish policy briefs that continue to explore these promising strategies by summarizing opportunities for environmental change in different areas including: the built environment, the food environment, and physical activity.

The Convergence Partnership will prioritize policies that promote equity and reduce health disparities, strengthen connections and collaboration across fields and in communities, support innovation and creativity in making environmental and policy changes in institutions and organizations, and leverage resources to help address uncovered and under-funded issues. Through its work, the Convergence Partnership will help to build the evidence base for environmental change.

The Convergence Partnership: One Player Among Many

The Healthy Eating Active Living Convergence Partnership has an expansive vision and an ambitious agenda. When realized, they will change people and places, promoting health in new and meaningful ways. But the Partnership will not be acting alone. True to its name, it will foster partnerships among funders, practitioners, and advocates to realize its vision. The Healthy Eating Active Living Convergence Partnership will deepen its investigations and investments to further its four core strategies in each of the initial areas—built environment, healthy eating, and physical activity.

The Convergence Partnership will work with funders.

The Healthy Eating Active Living Convergence Partnership supports far-reaching policy change to improve environments and health. At the same time, the Partnership is creating new avenues for how its funders—and those who will join them in the future—can support and sustain that change.

Toward this end, the Healthy Eating Active Living Convergence Partnership has developed a toolkit for funders (available shortly at www.convergencepartnership.org). The online toolkit provides information for

those who want to understand, and potentially replicate, the Partnership's multifield, equity-focused approach. Explanations for foundation staff members, grantees, and trustees are provided, along with materials to download and links to supporting research, background papers, and other resources.

The Convergence Partnership will work with practitioners and advocates.

The Healthy Eating Active Living Convergence Partnership's vision and strategies are based, in large part, on what it has learned from advocates working to create healthier environments in communities across the country. The Partnership is seeking ways to strengthen and extend that work within and across fields. With new incentives or a strategic nudge, parallel goals may indeed converge and multiple visions of health and well-being—for people *and* places—may be simultaneously achieved.

Changing the Big Picture: Changing Environments

Each funder involved in the Healthy Eating Active Living Convergence Partnership has its own portfolio with different policy, environmental, and institutional approaches in different areas of the country. Collectively, the Partners are committed to improving the nation's health and to supporting the most promising strategies for creating healthy environments. In some cases, pairs or triads of the Partners are working together. Building on these efforts, the Healthy Eating Active Living Convergence Partnership represents a new level of cooperation that both enhances and supports the activities at each of the Partner foundations, and will spark new collaborations among different funders.

This cooperation goes beyond the general benefits of sharing information and even sharing strategies or lessons about success or failure. The Healthy Eating Active Living Convergence Partnership is designed to catalyze each Partner's ability to see new connections that challenge and change the way it does its work, separately and together, internally and with others. The Partners also are working to break down the barriers in their own institutions and to build bridges across fields to highlight common interests. Through their collective, multi-sector, multifield perspective and frequent in-depth exchanges, the Partners are better able to recognize gaps that together the Partnership can work to fill.

Creating healthier neighborhoods, schools, childcare centers, and workplaces across the country will require synergy across many disciplines. The Healthy Eating Active Living Convergence Partnership aims to strengthen and accelerate collaborative efforts among practitioners, policymakers, funders, and advocates to support healthy eating and active living. Through policy and environmental change, we can create healthy people in healthy places—in every community.