POLICY, SYSTEMS, AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

What is Policy, Systems, and Environmental Change?

Policy, systems, and environmental change (PSE) strategies are a way of making sustainable, lasting change within a community to make healthy choices practical and available to all residents.

Where we live affects how we live - we can't make healthy choices if those healthy choices aren't available to us. PSE changes shape the physical environments that impact our behavior. By making changes to laws and rules and shaping environments, communities can go beyond providing programs and services to create long-lasting conditions so people can eat better and move more where they live, learn, work, and play.

A Programs Approach   VS.   A PSE Change Approach

A Programs Approach	A PSE Change Approach
Hosting a community bike ride	Implementing a Complete Streets policy to ensure community roads are designed to be safe and accessible for all users
Having an "open gym night" at a local school	Implementing a town-wide Joint Use Agreement enabling community members to have access to the school's gym and fields when school is not in session
Working with a corner store to become a designated Healthy Market	Creating a city-wide healthy retail program that supports food retailers to offer a variety of products and fresh, affordable healthy foods
Opening and maintaining a community garden	Passing a municipal urban agriculture ordinance or policy which allows residents to use space for community gardens

About Policy Change

Policy change includes the passing of laws, ordinances, resolutions, mandates, regulations, or rules. Government bodies (federal, state, or local), park districts, healthcare organizations, worksites, and other community institutions (schools, jails, daycare centers, etc.) all make policies. Policies greatly influence the daily decisions we make about our health. It is important to note that a policy must be implemented and enforced to make a change.

Active living example:
A municipality passing a Complete Streets bylaw, ordinance, or administrative policy to ensure community roads are designed to be safe and accessible for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities.

Healthy food access example:
Adopting a local Urban Agriculture ordinance or a policy to enable the use of vacant lots for activities such as community gardens.

About Systems Change

Systems change involves changes made to the policies, processes, power structures, and relationships within an organization that determine how resources and services get distributed. Systems change can also be implemented across organizations. Systems change and policy change often work hand-in-hand.

Active living example:
Creating a system for how municipal agencies work together to implement the Complete Streets Policy, ensuring that prioritization plans improve conditions and build infrastructure for all municipal neighborhoods.

Healthy food access example:
Creating an urban agriculture commission made up of City representatives, such as public health staff, economic development staff, planners, residents, and community partners, to advise the City on creating and implementing urban agriculture policies.

About Environmental Change

Environmental change is an actual transformation of the physical environment, and creates the most lasting change that can impact our behavior when paired with sustainable systems and policy improvements. Environmental change can be as simple as installing bike signage on already established bike routes or as complex as sidewalk installation and pedestrian friendly intersections to promote walking and biking among all citizens.

Active living example:
Municipalities using funding from the Complete Streets Funding Program to develop safe walking, biking, and transit routes throughout their communities.

Healthy food access example:
Municipalities implementing a city-wide community gardens program, making open space available for residents to grow fresh fruits and vegetables.

A focus on health equity

When making PSE changes, we must recognize the history that created the policies and practices we are trying to change. These policies and practices are often rooted in structural racism that has resulted in unequal access to environments that support healthy living (e.g. neighborhoods where parks or recreational spaces have been underfunded). Throughout the process of making changes, we should address racial and other inequities by asking: *Who will benefit? Who will be harmed? Who influences decisions? Who decides?*

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