



Neighborhood Fabric and Social – Community Connectedness

The neighborhood you live in can impact your health in two main ways: through the physical features and the social connections between people in that neighborhood.

The features of a neighborhood are things like parks and green space, sidewalks and bike lanes, and even things like road quality and how close the houses are to each other.¹ The features can impact health by supporting or stopping people from doing physical activities (like playing, biking, and running), which are an important part of a healthy lifestyle.² Well-designed and cared-for features of a neighborhood give people a place where they can be more active.³ Feeling safe in your neighborhood is also important. Features like good lighting can help people feel safe and encourage them to enjoy the neighborhood.

Levels of social connection in a neighborhood can also impact health. In fact, being a part of a social group can help people make healthier choices, through what is called social influence.⁴ A strong social group can also improve mental health and lower levels of violence by boosting a person's feelings of self-worth and importance, which increases the chances that they will get the help they need when they need it.⁵ So, while the features give people the space for healthy activity, social connectedness gives them the support to make the healthy choice.⁶

The State of Neighborhood Fabric and Social-Community Connectedness in Colorado

Given the diversity of Colorado communities, it is difficult to understand each neighborhood's own features and social cohesion. Instead, we can look at the state level. State-level data are important because they show that minority, rural, and low-income people have worse health than urban, high-income people. Using that information, we can understand qualities about Colorado communities and the health of Coloradans.^{7,8}

Colorado is considered one of the healthiest states in the nation. In Shaping a State of Health, Colorado's Plan for Improving Public Health and the Environment, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) prioritized mental health and the prevention of substance abuse and obesity through systems change.⁹ CDPHE together with partners in the private and charity sectors have funded a number of programs focused on creating healthy communities. Many of these programs are focused on healthy eating and active living and on enhancing the built environment. There is no direct evidence that these Colorado efforts have made an impact on mental health, substance abuse, violence or chronic disease outcomes, but research would support the conclusion that positive outcomes are likely.

¹ Shobha Srinivasan, Liam O'Fallon, and Allen Dearry, "Creating Healthy Communities, Healthy Homes, Healthy People: Initiative a Research Agenda on the Built Environment and Public Health," *American Journal of Public Health* 93, no. 9 (2003), http://coursesources.mit.usf.edu/sgs/ph6934/webpages/CC/module_1/read/1446.pdf

² Lawrence Frank, Martin Andresen, and Thomas Schmid, "Obesity Relationships with Community Design, Physical Activity, and Time Spent in Cars," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 27, no. 2 (2004): 87-96, [http://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(04\)00087-X/fulltext#Introduction](http://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(04)00087-X/fulltext#Introduction)

³ James F. Sallis, Myron F. Floyd, Daniel A. Rodriguez, and Brian E. Saelens, "The Role of Built Environments in Physical Activity, Obesity, and CVD," *Circulation* 125, no. 5 (2012): 729-737, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3315587/>

⁴ Ichiro Kawachi and Lisa F. Berkman, "Social Ties and Mental Health," *Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 78, no. 3 (2001): 458-467, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3455910/pdf/11524_2006_Article_44.pdf

⁵ Ichiro Kawachi and Lisa F. Berkman, "Social Ties and Mental Health," *Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 78, no. 3 (2001): 458-467, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3455910/pdf/11524_2006_Article_44.pdf

⁶ Carl A. Latkin and Amy R. Knowlton, "Social Network Assessments and Interventions for Health Behavior Change: a Critical Review," *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* 41, no. 3 (2015): 90-97, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4786366/>

⁷ Kelli Gruber, Amy Anderson Mellies, and Renee Calanan, "Disparities in the Prevalence of Adult Overweight and Obesity by Demographic Characteristics – Colorado BRFSS, 2011-2014," *CDPHE Health Watch* no. 98 (2016), <http://www.chd.dph.state.co.us/Resources/pubs/AdultOverbeseDisparitiesFinal.pdf>

⁸ Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, VISION: Visual Information System for Identifying Opportunities and Needs Tool, <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/vision-data-tool>

⁹ Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, "Healthy Colorado: Shaping a State of Health Colorado's Plan for Improving Public Health and the Environment," https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/OPP_2015-CO-State-Plan.pdf



Improving Neighborhood Fabric and Social Connectedness

Because each neighborhood is different, no single approach will fit all circumstances, but there are many ways to make neighborhood features and social connectedness better.¹⁰ The examples below show different ways neighborhoods and states have improved their communities.

Case Study Activities

<p>KC Healthy Kids Collaborative¹¹</p>	<p>GOAL: Improve health by building a strong community and improving access to healthy foods</p>	<p>STRATEGY: Neighborhood Empowerment Toolkit and changing policy to allow more farmer's markets and the creation of community gardens in unused spaces</p>
<p>PATH Study¹²</p>	<p>GOAL: Improve health with more physical activity</p>	<p>STRATEGY: Social media to advertise walking groups with police escorts so people feel safe</p>
<p>Santa Monica Wellbeing Project¹³</p>	<p>GOAL: Improve wellbeing with more physical activity and social connection</p>	<p>STRATEGY: Use a Wellbeing Index to let people know about their overall level of wellbeing and give information on how wellbeing can be improved through exercise and social networking</p>

Outcomes

Studies have shown that physical activity is an important part of a healthy lifestyle and that social support can help people make healthy choices and improve their mental health. We also know that people are more likely to use their neighborhoods for physical activity when the neighborhoods are safe, nice, and well-kept, especially if they also have a strong social network. Strong social connectedness can also improve health by reducing the level of mental health issues, violence, and drug abuse.¹⁴ Efforts that put time and money into making neighborhoods nicer and safer and that offer programs for people to connect with each other can ultimately lead to a happier and healthier community.

¹⁰ Gopal Singh, Mohammad Siahpush, and Michael Kogan, "Neighborhood Socioeconomic Conditions, Built Environments, and Childhood Obesity," *Health Affairs* 29, no. 3 (2010): 503-512, <http://content.healthaffairs.org/content/29/3/503.full.html>

¹¹ "About," KC Healthy Kids, <https://www.kchealthkids.org/program/about/>

¹² Dawn Wilson, M. Lee Van Horn, E. Rebekah Sicheloff, Kassandra Alia, Sara M. St. George, Hannah G. Lawman, Nevelyn N. Trumpeter, Sandra M. Coulon, Sarah E. Griffin, Abraham Wandersman, Brent Egan, Natalie Colabianchi, Melinda Forthofer, and Barney Gadsdon, "The Results of the Positive Action of Today's Health (PATH) Trial for Increasing Walking and Physical Activity in Underserved African-American Communities," *Annals of Behavioral Medicine* 49, no. 3 (2015): 398-410, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4426390/>

¹³ "Creating a City for Wellbeing: Key Findings about Wellbeing Perspectives and Assets in Santa Monica," Santa Monica Wellbeing Project (2015), <https://wellbeing.smgov.net/Media/Default/docs/WellbeingProject-Index-Findings-April2015.pdf>

¹⁴ Eva Leslie, Brian Saelens, Lawrence Frank, Neville Owen, Adrian Bauman, Neil Coffee, and Graeme Hugo, "Residents' Perceptions of Walkability Attributes in Objectively Different Neighbourhoods: a Pilot Study," *Health and Place* 11 (2005) https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Brian_Saelens/publication/7961246_Residents%27_perceptions_of_walkability_attributes_in_objectively_different_neighbourhood_A_pilot_study/links/09e4150d3905dcb4e000000/Residents-perceptions-of-walkability-attributes-in-objectively-different-neighbourhood-A-pilot-study.pdf