



Focus Area 12: Improve health outcomes for our region's residents.

What and why. While a community's plan to build a supermarket or road may not sound like a health policy at first, public decisions like these can profoundly affect residents' health. Heavy construction could create air pollution that harms people in the surrounding neighborhoods, but a new supermarket could make it more convenient to buy healthy food. A new bike lane could increase the physical fitness of residents and provide alternative transportation options that reduce stress, but it could increase the number of bicycle accidents and potential injuries to cyclists.

Genetics plays an important role in health, but social conditions, such as a family's ability to afford safe housing or medical care, also affect health outcomes. The physical environment is also important, including air and water quality, proximity to outdoor and recreational opportunities, affordability and accessibility of fresh, healthy foods, and the safety of streets and neighborhoods.

Improving the health of the region's residents and communities is critically important to ensuring the region's long-term sustainability. Improving health can reduce health care costs, increase social cohesion, and boost overall well-being and satisfaction—all of which are key elements of sustainability. Building healthy communities requires a "health in all policies" approach by all partners within the region. This means that no matter what their primary mission is—transportation, recreation, arts and culture, housing, natural resource protection, or community development—the policies they develop should consider potential health impacts.

How. This focus area seeks to improve the health of North Jersey residents by integrating the consideration of health outcomes into all policies and planning. Health in all Policies (HiAP) is a collaborative approach to improving public health and health equity by systematically taking into account the health implications of decisions made by all government and nontraditional partners who have influence over the social determinants of health. Some specific areas for improvement include: increasing access to healthy food and healthcare facilities, enhancing health education programs, creating safe and healthy buildings and neighborhoods, improving neighborhood safety through community-driven crime prevention, and improving conditions in communities that are disproportionately burdened by air pollution and other environmental hazards.

Strategy 12.1: Integrate public health considerations in all aspects of planning and policy-making

Advancement of a HiAP approach in North Jersey requires visioning and planning efforts and integrating health considerations into decision-making processes. Together North Jersey partners should work to create a shared vision of healthy communities and make

recommendations for intersectoral actions. Government agencies and decision-makers should consider every planning and policy window as an opportunity to improve public health. Actors from all sectors should employ tools to evaluate the potential health effects, both positive and negative, of plans, projects, and policies prior to implementation. For example, a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is an established practice for HiAP planning and can be conducted to predict health outcomes from construction projects like new housing or educational and transportation facilities or for plans and policies like master plans, zoning codes, and ordinances. Recommendations from an HIA can be used to mitigate potential adverse outcomes. Other HiAP policy analysis tools include legislative health notes, health checklists, and health lens analysis. Communities across north jersey can begin applying HiAP practices using one of these tools, developing cross-sector relationships, coordinating funding and investments and improving data sharing.

Strategy 12.2: Increase access to affordable, healthy foods and maximize access to locally produced fresh food

Our region has a high number of “food deserts”— low-income areas where there is very limited (or no) access to fresh and affordable foods. We can improve health outcomes for North Jersey residents by identifying the location of these food deserts, promoting the use of the TNJ Guidebook for Assessing Food Access, and building coalitions of government agencies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector to make fresh and nutritious food accessible to all residents, regardless of income. In addition, efforts to eliminate food deserts can boost local economies; reduce emissions and other environmental impacts from the transportation of foods to market; and promote physical activity if supermarkets, farmers' markets, community gardens and other sources of healthy, local food are located in walkable areas, especially near public transit.

Strategy 12.3: Increase access to quality healthcare facilities, especially for medically underserved communities

Residents in the region should have easy access to medical facilities that meet their health needs—regardless of their income level or where they live. We can improve access to healthcare by opening more medical facilities in underserved areas, ensuring that these facilities are accessible by public transit as well as personal vehicles, and conducting outreach to inform the public about available health care resources and options for receiving affordable healthcare. We should also conduct a thorough regional assessment to identify areas where current healthcare facilities are insufficient, use findings from the assessment to develop targeted strategies for those areas, and improve overall coordination of transportation for medical appointments. In addition, the recent expansion of telemedicine and virtual appointments could provide additional resources for underserved communities, and the region should support necessary investments in telecommunications infrastructure (see Focus Area 2).

Strategy 12.4: Enhance health education programs

Educating residents about healthy lifestyle choices is an important complement to building healthy communities. Effective education programs must be easy for residents to access and attend and must meet the specific needs of local populations. They must be offered in the languages commonly spoken by participants, include special accommodation for senior citizens and children and/or focus on the specific issues that can most improve health for residents in each community. Our region should establish a multi-lingual "Building Healthier Communities" initiative to promote healthy lifestyles, physical activity, nutrition and personal preventative care for all residents in the region. We should also prepare a compendium of healthy lifestyle education program "best practices" to serve as a resource guide for health education programs in the region and partner with arts organizations to develop education and outreach materials on the role of the arts in improving health outcomes.

Strategy 12.5: Create healthy buildings and communities through planning and design

Our neighborhoods and built environments are known social determinants of health, yet, most residences, workplaces, and communities are not designed to promote health. Local governments must adopt and implement policies and programs that enhance health-promoting places to encourage physical activity, mitigate viral transmissions, and minimize the negative impacts of building materials. Together North Jersey can support local governments to raise awareness of health and the built environment amongst developers, property owners, designers and investors. By disseminating information related to design components, programming strategies, materials, and other approaches that nurture occupant health, TNJ can advance the state of practice of planning and designing healthy buildings and communities. In addition, municipalities should ensure that property maintenance codes are properly enforced and should develop new standards that promote healthy homes and green design.

Strategy 12.6: Promote activated, well-maintained, safe neighborhoods through community design

Neighborhood safety is fundamental to the health and liveliness of any community, and it is also crucial in attracting and retaining community-minded residents and businesses. Unfortunately, crime and the fear of crime can cripple neighborhoods' ability to thrive. Perceptions of crime and disorder are often closely connected to public space design and maintenance conditions, but the reality of neighborhood crime is not that simple. Our region must make a long-term commitment to neighborhood safety by acknowledging that the roots of crime are complex and that community-based, collaborative problem-solving approaches to public safety, access to resources, vibrant physical spaces, and civic trust are all necessary. Our region should promote active, well-maintained, safe neighborhoods by conducting symposia on integrating environmental security plans with community-driven public safety solutions; facilitating and

promoting education training on co-creative design processes; piloting a public space improvement program to promote the use of community-led design; encouraging CBOs and municipalities to offer youth programs focused on sustainability and stewardship.

Strategy 12.7: Improve conditions for communities that are disproportionately burdened by environmental and public health stressors

Historically, minority and low-income communities in New Jersey, like the rest of the country, have been disproportionately burdened by environmental and public health stressors, including air and water pollution. As a result, these populations suffer from increased adverse health effects, such as asthma, cancer, cardiovascular disease and others. These disproportionate impacts often result from the cumulative impacts of multiple polluting facilities.

By incorporating environmental justice considerations into decision-making processes, policies, regulations and programs, we can help prevent future and remedy existing disparities and ensure that North Jersey residents of all backgrounds live, work and recreate in a clean and healthy environment. Environmental justice means no group of people bears a disproportionate share of negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, governmental and commercial operations or policies and that all people have an opportunity to meaningfully participate in decisions about activities that may affect their environment or health. Local communities can require an assessment of the cumulative environmental impacts of proposed commercial and industrial facilities and activities. In overburdened areas, we should implement proven strategies to reduce air pollution and other adverse environmental impacts, adopt improved data collection and analysis techniques; implement land use policies and green infrastructure projects that reduce and mitigate environmental impacts, and continue to implement the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey's Clean Air Strategy.