

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SMART GROWTH & INJURY PREVENTION ROUNDTABLE



BACKGROUND

In 2009, the Safe States Alliance (formerly STIPDA) and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) convened a group of 26 subject matter experts, stakeholders, and state and national leaders to discuss their perspectives and experiences with developing and implementing Smart Growth initiatives. Participants included representatives of state health departments, federal agencies, local governments, consulting firms, national non-profit organizations, and public health associations.

The purpose of the meeting was two-fold:

1. To identify ways in which transportation and land-use planners can work effectively with public health professionals to make injury and violence prevention a priority in planning and decision-making; and
2. To determine ways in which public health professionals – especially those working in injury and violence prevention – can better engage in Smart Growth efforts in their states and communities.

This issue brief provides highlights from the summary report, including presentations by participants, ideas and issues raised during discussions, and suggestions for furthering collaborative efforts between professionals in public health and planning.

“THIS IS SMART GROWTH”

Tim Torma of the Smart Growth Program at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Urban Sprawl Creates a Variety of Issues

Urban growth can affect a wide range of goals associated with the environment, energy independence, public health and safety, and social equity. As a result of urban sprawl and development:

- Families have limited transportation choices and destinations often require driving;
- Vehicle miles traveled have increased substantially more than the U.S. population and transportation is responsible for more CO₂ emissions than the industrial, residential, and commercial sectors;
- The ability of a growing number of older adults to travel to and from destinations safely is in question; and
- Adverse environmental impacts (e.g., increased runoff, sustainability of threatened species) have been heightened.

Principles of Smart Growth

Smart Growth is defined as “development that revitalizes neighborhoods, protects farmland and open space, keeps housing affordable, and provides more transportation choices.” This development is “good for the economy, community, public health, and the environment.”

Unlike low density development, Smart Growth encourages the development of mixed-use communities that are: compact; pedestrian and cyclist-friendly; have public transit as a central component; provide a range of housing choices; and embrace principles of environmental justice.

The ten principles of Smart Growth include:

1. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices
2. Create walkable neighborhoods
3. Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration
4. Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place
5. Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost-effective
6. Mix land uses
7. Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas
8. Provide a variety of transportation choices
9. Strengthen and direct development toward existing communities
10. Take advantage of compact building design

Smart Growth can take place in any setting – from rural towns to suburbs and cities, and can look different in every location, based on a community’s culture, geography, population, and needs.

Support for Smart Growth is growing. Research shows that much of the growth in support is due to demographic trends and buyer preferences associated with the aging of Americans.



“TRANSPORTATION PLANNING & SMART GROWTH”

Joel McCarroll of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO)

Planning Should Be Integrated

Transportation planning should be integrated with land-use planning to improve performance measures, to better predict growth in all transportation modes (other than vehicle traffic), and to better measure the full effects and impacts of transportation alternatives.

Phases of transportation planning include:

- Agency policy (i.e., Complete Streets, level of service standards, and access management);
- Planning (informed by system or corridor plans, management systems, public input from local governments and state legislatures); and
- Project development.

Partnerships are Essential

State departments of transportation (DOTs) can partner with land owners, municipal governments, and developers to solve the problems of traffic demand in creative and collaborative ways. Partnerships can help municipalities make better use of land that is already developed, create opportunities for other transportation modes, and allow for continued growth without forcing travelers to endure constant gridlock on roads. While it is preferable that these partnerships are created through initial planning, existing communities and road networks can also be retrofitted in communities that are already impacted by sprawl, low-density land use, and roads that can no longer be widened.



“PUBLIC HEALTH & SMART GROWTH”

Dr. Andrew L. Dannenburg of the National Center for Environmental Health at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Community Design & Public Health are Interrelated

Community design is directly and indirectly related to public health:

- Land use is related to obesity, physical activity, cardiovascular disease (CVD), and water quantity and quality.
- Automobile dependency is related to air pollution, asthma

rates, climate change, car crashes, and pedestrian injuries.

- Social processes, such as mental health, social capital, and environmental justice are all linked to community design.



Walking & Biking are Linked to Fewer Pedestrian Injuries

In a study published in the *American Journal of Public Health*,⁶ the trends of walking and biking were compared between the U.S., Germany, and the Netherlands. When compared internationally, U.S. residents made fewer trips by walking or biking (7%) than residents of Germany (34%) or the Netherlands (46%), yet endured nearly three times more pedestrian fatalities than both countries combined. In fact, for all three countries, the lower the percentage of walking and biking, the higher the total of pedestrian fatalities.

HIAs Can Be Valuable Tools

A Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is a “collection of procedures and tools by which projects, policies, and programs can be evaluated based on their potential effects on the health of a population, and the distribution of those effects within the population.”

Community planners and zoning boards can request information from HIAs to determine potential health consequences of projects and policies as part of their decision-making process. HIAs can also provide health officers with a tool to facilitate their involvement in community planning and land use decisions.

Health impacts that can be considered in an HIA include:

- Physical activity, obesity, and cardiovascular disease (CVD)
- Air quality, asthma, other respiratory diseases
- Water quality and waterborne diseases
- Food quality, nutrition, and foodborne diseases
- Motor vehicle, pedestrian, and other injuries
- Accessibility for persons with disabilities
- Noise, mental health
- Social capital, community severance
- Access to jobs, stores, schools, recreation, and public transit
- Social equity, environmental justice

HIAs can vary in complexity and can be voluntary or regulatory. Results of HIAs, if used properly, can lead to a variety of improvements in proposed project plans.

⁶Source: “Promoting Safe Walking and Cycling to Improve Public Health: Lessons From The Netherlands and Germany,” *Am J Public Health* 2003; 93: 1509-1516.



“TIMING IS EVERYTHING”

Dr. Alex Kelter of the Local Government Commission

Smart Growth Crosses Sectors

There are 15 ways to say “Smart Growth”:

1. Physical activity
2. Nutrition/Food access/Food deserts
3. Climate change
4. Cost of Living/Transportation
5. Health Reform
6. Education/Neighborhood Schools
7. Social capital
8. Community engagement/Volunteerism
9. Resilience/Disaster response/Recovery
10. Law enforcement
11. A vibrant, recession-resistant economy
12. Jobs-housing balance
13. Energy efficiency
14. Habitat preservation
15. Environment stewardship

Public health professionals should talk to professionals in all sectors. Public health professionals are particularly valuable allies, as they convey credibility, add a sense of moral high ground, and provide a breadth of support.

SOLUTIONS FOR TRANSPORTATION & LAND-USE PLANNERS

Roundtable participants were asked to develop solutions that would encourage transportation and land-use planners to make injury and violence prevention a priority in planning and decision-making. Solutions included:

- Providing training (professional and graduate-level) that goes beyond the historical focus on traffic flow and capacity and helps planners better understand the need to promote health and wellness.
- Passing state laws that mandate “Complete Streets” policies and advocating to Congress to continue Complete Streets initiatives.
- Requiring HIAs to better understand the potential impacts projects have on community health.
- Revising the highway safety manual (AASHTO Green Book) to include a focus on prevention practices.

- Creating incentives and performance measures that are based on health outcomes and tied to federal funding.
- Communicating to planners how public health practitioners can help them accomplish their goals, given their access to valuable data sets, experience in developing interventions to change behavior, and ability to mobilize communities and build coalitions.
- Obtaining political will from policy makers by identifying champions, sharing success stories and innovations, utilizing the mass media, and building grassroots support.

SOLUTIONS FOR PUBLIC HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Roundtable participants were asked to develop solutions that would encourage public health professionals – particularly those working in injury and violence prevention – to engage in Smart Growth efforts within their states and communities. Solutions included:

- Furthering the dialogue between public health professionals and planners, engineers, and others working on Smart Growth projects.
- Making Smart Growth a priority by tying funding for Smart Growth efforts into chronic disease and other public efforts to ensure cross-programmatic collaboration.
- Reframing and redefining Smart Growth in a way that allows it to fit naturally into what public health agencies already do.
- Sharing success stories, educating policy makers on the broad focus of public health, and emphasizing the costs of inaction.
- Providing training (professional and graduate-level) to help public health students, practitioners, and leaders understand the value of Smart Growth and community design efforts.
- Developing performance indicators for staff and agencies.
- Develop communication messages that emphasize preventability of injury/death through projects that make injuries “preventable by design.”
- Conducting more research that demonstrates the correlation between livable communities and health.



Additional information and resources from the Smart Growth & Injury Prevention Roundtable, including suggested next steps listed in the summary report, are available on the Safe States Alliance website at www.safestates.org.