

King County Board of Health Planning for Healthy Communities

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King County Board of Health Guidelines: Planning for Healthy Communities

OVERVIEW

The King County Board of Health functions to set county-wide public health policy, enact and enforce local public health regulations, and carry out other duties of local boards of health specified in RCW 70.50.060 ". . . to preserve, promote, and improve the public health". The Board of Health is constituted as a federated body, with three members from the Metropolitan King County Council, three from the Seattle City Council, two from the Suburban Cities of King County, and three health professionals selected by the other members of the Board. The health professionals serve as public health experts, assisting the Board with complex, often technical public health issues.

In 2008, the Puget Sound Regional Council adopted VISION 2040, the growth management, environmental, economic, and transportation strategy for the Central Puget Sound Region which contains strategies for promoting the well-being of people and communities, economic vitality, and a healthy environment. Within VISION 2040, the Built Environment and Health section includes a broad goal and policies to serve as a platform for counties and cities as they continue to integrate knowledge of public health impacts into their planning activities. The Board of Health, based on its function to promote and improve public health for all King County residents, determined this an opportune time to provide additional guidance and detail as jurisdictions work to include the VISION 2040 policies on the built environment and health into their planning processes.

Urban planning and public health have been linked for nearly a century, starting from the need to prevent infectious disease outbreaks in the early 1900's. More recently public health agencies, including the King County Board of Health, have returned to a focus on urban design as we realize more and more that "place" does matter and that the leading causes of death and disability (cancer, cardiovascular and respiratory disease, stroke, diabetes, obesity, injury – see *Background Data: Table 1*) are linked to the environments where we live, work, learn and play.

The King County Board of Health developed the Planning for Healthy Communities Guidelines to help guide and inform land use and transportation planning and development practices in unincorporated King County and cities. The Board of Health has been actively promoting the goals of healthy eating and active living since 2005 through the Overweight Prevention Initiative and other efforts. The Board realizes that an increasing body of evidence and best-practices shows that land use and transportation planning decisions can create environments that allow people to be physically active, eat healthy food, and live in safe and healthy places.

The Board of Health developed the Guidelines using actual leading causes of death in King County (see *Background Data: Table 2*). 'Actual' causes of death are the behaviors and exposures to harmful conditions that have a major influence on the causes of death. Many of the actual causes, including, tobacco use, poor diet and physical inactivity, alcohol consumption, microbial and toxic agents, and injuries from motor vehicle collisions and violence, can be influenced by planning decisions. Also included in the Guidelines are mental health and well-being and access to health care, both closely linked to leading causes of disability and can be impacted by planning. All of the factors addressed by the Guidelines cause a large portion of the impaired quality of life and premature deaths from preventable causes in King County. For example, physical inactivity and exposure to toxic agents could be reduced if people lived in neighborhoods with well-connected, safe, attractive street networks that provided pedestrian and bicycle access to shopping, transit, schools and other daily destinations. Reducing dependency on cars increases opportunities to be physically active and improves air quality. Also, planning decisions can influence parks and trails which provide opportunities for family recreation and sports, and, when integrated with residential areas and schools, can increase opportunities for bicycling and walking close to people's homes.

Finally, the Board of Health supports the reintegration of public health into planning decisions as an important strategy to ensure that all people and communities have the opportunity to make healthy choices regardless of their income, education or ethnic background.

PLANNING FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES GUIDELINES

The following nine guidelines are intended to inform land use and transportation planners working at regional, county, and city levels of actions and strategies to improve the health of residents and communities throughout King County. The guidelines are framed around leading actual causes of preventable death and illness in King County. Each guideline includes a rationale describing the link between health and planning and a list of key healthy community elements. The guidelines apply to all populations of King County; particularly the very young, the very old, those with compromised health, and those living in harmful environments and near environmental hazards. These groups merit special attention because they bear disproportionate rates of disease and disability.

Physical Activity

1) Board of Health Guideline: Residents in all communities in King County have access to safe and convenient opportunities for physical activity and exercise.

Rationale: Planning and design that encourages and enables access to walking, bicycling, transit, and other means of exercise in safe and inviting environments provides residents with ways to obtain needed levels of daily physical activity.

Key Healthy Community Planning Elements:

- Housing, schools, jobs, parks, and commercial and public services within walkable proximity of neighborhoods;
- Number, size, and accessibility of parks and open space;
- Presence of sidewalks, walking and bicycle paths;
- Transit safely reached by walking or bicycling;
- Presence of affordable community centers and other recreational facilities.

Nutrition

2) Board of Health Guideline: Residents in all communities in King County have access to healthy, affordable foods.

Rationale: Land use planning incorporates all aspects of the food system, especially access to healthy, affordable, and nutritious foods.

Key Healthy Community Planning Elements:

- A robust local farm to table chain, including community gardens and other food growing opportunities in urban areas;
- Long-term preservation of farm land;
- Number and location of healthy food retail outlets including farmers' markets and grocery stores;
- Safe and reliable transportation options to healthy food retail outlets.

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Harmful Environmental Exposures

3) Board of Health Guideline: Residents in all communities in King County are protected from exposure to harmful environmental agents and infectious diseases.

Rationale: Community design and land use, building, and housing standards can reduce exposure to harmful environmental agents in our air, water, food and soil.

Key Healthy Community Planning Elements:

- Building and design standards that create safe, healthy, and accessible indoor environments;
- Planning policies and practices to reduce generation of and exposure to air pollutants;
- Water resource management that provides safe water for drinking, recreation, and fisheries;
- Management of standing water to prevent transmission of infectious disease;
- Safe management and disposal of solid and hazardous waste and overall reduction of solid and hazardous waste.

Injury

4) Board of Health Guideline: Residents in all communities in King County use transportation systems designed to prevent driver, bicyclist and pedestrian injuries.

Rationale: Land use patterns, roadway design, and availability of and access to safe non-motorized transportation can reduce risk of motor vehicle collisions and bicycle and pedestrian injuries.

Key Healthy Community Planning Elements:

- Safe roadways and roadway design that prevent motor vehicle collisions;
- Safe pedestrian paths, sidewalks, and street crossings;
- Well designed and safe bicycle paths and lanes.

5) Board of Health Guideline: Residents in all communities in King County live in safe communities free from violence and fear of violence.

Rationale: Land use patterns and community design can create environments that reduce violence by fostering a sense of community and security in which residents are safe accessing services, recreation, schools, and jobs.

Key Healthy Community Planning Elements:

- Commercial districts and community spaces designed for interaction and community cohesiveness, safety, and convenient access;
- Presence of well lit and maintained parks, streetscapes, and other public spaces;
- Site and building design enables open and unobstructed views of public areas and prevents isolated and hidden spaces.

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Tobacco Use

6) Board of Health Guideline: Residents in all communities in King County are protected from involuntary exposure to second hand tobacco smoke and children cannot access tobacco products.

Rationale: Land use patterns, ordinances, and zoning affect access to and use of tobacco products and exposure to secondhand smoke.

Key Healthy Community Planning Elements:

- Policies limiting tobacco use and exposure to second hand smoke;
- Planning practices limiting tobacco retail outlets near public open spaces and youth-centered facilities, especially schools.

Alcohol Use

7) Board of Health Guideline: Residents in all communities in King County are protected from negative impacts of alcohol.

Rationale: Land use patterns, ordinances, and zoning can affect access to and use of alcohol products and alcohol-related violence and injury.

Key Healthy Community Planning Elements:

- Land use and zoning patterns inform community decisions about access to alcohol;
- Planning practices managing the location and impact of bars, taverns, and retail outlets that sell alcohol near public open spaces and youth-centered facilities.

Mental Health and Well-being

8) Board of Health Guideline: Residents in all communities in King County benefit from community design that maximizes opportunities for social connectivity and stress reduction.

Rationale: Community design can reduce individual isolation, promote social interaction and community cohesiveness, and alleviate environmental determinants of stress.

Key Healthy Community Planning Elements:

- Safe, inviting, accessible venues and community places that encourage beneficial social interaction and community cohesiveness;
- Parks and green spaces that provide stress relief, rest, and relaxation;
- Noise levels managed and mitigated, especially near residential neighborhoods, schools, and hospitals.

Access to Health Care

9) Board of Health Guideline: Residents in all communities in King County have local access to health care services.

Rationale: Accessibility of health care services in a community is an important determinant of community health and well-being.

Key Healthy Community Planning Elements:

- Number and accessibility of health clinics providing routine and preventive medical care;
- Availability of urgent and emergency care services;
- Location and response time for emergency response units.

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BACKGROUND DATA

Table 1. Leading Causes of Death

Leading Causes of Death, King County, 5-year Average, 2003-2007

	Rate per 100,000	Average Annual Count
All Causes	657.6	11474
Cancer	163.8	2798
Heart Disease	149.2	2608
Stroke	44.6	776
Alzheimer's disease	36.8	659
Unintentional injury	31.6	587
Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease	32.4	539
Diabetes	20.1	346
Influenza and Pneumonia	13.4	237
Suicide	11.1	212
Chronic Liver Disease and Cirrhosis	7.8	145

Table 2. Actual Causes of Death and Impacts on Health

Actual Causes of Death Estimated Impact, King County, 2008*

Tobacco Use	18% / 2200 deaths
Poor Diet and Physical Inactivity	17% / 2000 deaths
Alcohol Consumption	4% / 420 deaths
Microbial Agents	3% / 370 deaths
Toxic Agents	2% / 280 deaths
Motor Vehicle	2% / 220 deaths
Firearm Use**	1% / 140 deaths
Sexual Behavior**	0.8% / 100 deaths
Illicit Drug Use**	0.7% / 80 deaths

Other Causes Impacting Health

Mental Health and Well-being	36% of adults 18 or older report 1 or more days of poor mental health in the last month; 8% report frequent mental distress†
Access to Health Care	12.3%, or about 152,000 King County adults ages 18-64 in 2009, and 4.3%, or about 17,000 King County children ages 0-17 did not have health insurance coverage in 2008‡

* Source: Public Health - Seattle & King County, Assessment, Policy Development & Evaluation Unit <http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/data/chi2009/HealthOutcomesCauseofDeath.aspx>. King County estimate based on local and national deaths data and Mokdad et al, 2004, JAMA, 291(10): 1238-1245. Numbers of deaths are not adjusted for local behavioral risk factor prevalence rates because comprehensive local data are not available.

**Not included in Guidelines Framework –considered not as closely linked with planning.

† Source: Washington State/King County/U.S. Centers for Disease Control Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance.

‡ Source: Washington State/King County/U.S. Centers for Disease Control Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System; 2009 data. State Population Survey, Washington State Office of Financial Management, 2008 data.

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