

Healthy Community Principles

These healthy community principles, are well summarized by Ayre, Clough & Norris.¹²

“Communities across the nation are using a variety of change models and planning processes to work together to achieve their visions of improved health. Regardless of the approaches taken to meet their challenges, the following principles are guiding the most successful initiatives.

Use a broad definition of “health”

Health is not the absence of disease. Health is defined broadly to include the full range of quality of life issues. It recognizes that most of what creates health is lifestyle and behavior-related. Other major factors are genetic endowment and the socioeconomic, cultural and physical environment. Health is a by-product of a wide array of choices and factors – not the simple result of a medical care intervention.

Use a broad definition of “community”

By using as broad a definition as possible of what makes up a community, individuals and partnerships can address their shared issues in the most fruitful way possible. Communities can be based on faith, perspective, land and profession, as well as being determined by geographic lines.

Create a shared vision from community – (See the future through shared values)

A community’s vision is the story of its desired future. To be powerful and inspiring, a community’s vision should reflect the core values of its diverse members. A vision is not just a statement on the wall – it is a living expression of shared accountability to priorities.

Address quality of life for everyone

Healthy communities strive to ensure that the basic emotional, physical and spiritual needs of everyone in the community are attended to.

Build diverse citizen participation and widespread community

In healthy communities, all people take active and ongoing responsibility for themselves, their families, their property and their community. A leader’s work is to find common ground among participants so that everyone is empowered to take direct action for health and influence community directions.

Focus on “systems change”

This is about changing the way people live and work together. It is about how community services are delivered, how information is shared, how local government operates and how business is conducted. It’s about resource allocation and decision-making, not just “nice” projects.

Build capacity using local assets and resources

This means starting from existing community strengths and successes and then investing in the enhancement of a community’s “civic infrastructure.” By developing an infrastructure that encourages health, fewer resources will need to be spent on “back end” services that attempt to fix the problems resulting from a weak infrastructure.

Measure progress

Healthy communities use performance measures and community indicators to help expand the flow of information and accountability to all citizens, as well as to reveal whether residents are heading toward or away from their stated goals. Timely, accurate information is vital to sustaining long-term community improvement.”