



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

YMCA of the USA's Healthier Communities Initiatives

In 190 communities across the nation, Ys are working in collaboration with other community leaders on an intentional effort to ensure that healthy living is within reach of the people who live in those communities. Ys engaged in our Healthier Communities Initiatives (Pioneering Healthier Communities, Statewide Pioneering Healthier Communities and Action Communities for Health Innovation and EnVironmental changE) are helping families put healthier food on the table by brining fresh fruits and vegetables to neighborhoods where there are no healthy food options; making streets safer for all users with Complete Streets initiatives; giving parents peace of mind when they let their kids walk to school by making safe routes to schools possible; helping to keep a generation of kids healthier by working with schools to increase physical education and physical activity during the school day; and that is just the tip of the iceberg.

Y-USA's Healthier Communities Initiatives (HCI) engage community leaders, convened by local Ys, in policy and environmental change efforts that support and promote healthy lifestyles. Through these initiatives, Y-USA empower local communities with proven strategies and models to create and sustain positive, lasting change for healthy living.

Strategic Objectives and Activities

The chief strategic objectives for this work include:

- Enhancing the importance of a healthy lifestyle;
- Building relationships within communities by focusing on the leading health issues facing this country;
- Strengthening the capacity for coalition building in communities; and
- Attracting a new set of volunteers to the effort to build a healthy community; and
- Increasing the community's ability to promote policy and environmental changes that encourage and support healthy living.

There are three distinct parts to Y-USA's Healthier Communities Initiatives:

Pioneering Healthier Communities (PHC, launched in 2004)

Y-USA launched Pioneering Healthier Communities (PHC) is the Y's signature initiative that focuses on collaborative engagement with community leaders, how environments influence health and well-being and the role policy plays in sustaining change. With support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and corporate and foundation donors, a total of 118 Ys and their communities are participating, including six Ys recently selected for

the health equity pilot that will create change in neighborhoods most affected by health disparities in order to make it easier for kids, individuals, and families to lead healthier lifestyles regardless of income, education or ethnicity.

Statewide Pioneering Healthier Communities (Statewide PHC, launched in 2009)

Y-USA received funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) to launch a statewide PHC policy change initiative at the local and state levels in six states and 32 communities over a period of five years. The aim of this initiative is to address the childhood obesity epidemic through policy and environmental changes that will have implications for communities, states and the nation. This work is centered in Connecticut, Illinois, Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio, and Tennessee.

Action Communities for Health, Innovation, and EnVironmental Change (ACHIEVE, launched in 2008)

The Action Communities for Health, Innovation, and EnVironmental Change (ACHIEVE) initiative was launched in 2008 and is a partnership between local communities and national and state organizations joined in a movement to prevent chronic disease and related risk factors. These community efforts are convened through a national network of partners and are implemented through a collaborative approach. ACHIEVE was inspired, in part, by Y-USA's Pioneering Healthier Communities. ACHIEVE builds on the success of PHC and formalizes the relationship between Ys, local and state health departments, parks and recreation departments and other community based organizations. ACHIEVE is supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and is a partnership among the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors (NACDD), the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), the Society for Public Health Education, and Y-USA. There are 40 Ys and their communities engaged in ACHIEVE.

Key principles are common to all three initiatives:

- High-level community leaders are involved at every step, utilizing their positions, influence, and ability to make changes within their organization and within the greater community;
- Multiple sectors and diverse organizations are involved to maximize experience, assets, resources and skills;
- The ultimate goal is to influence policy and environmental changes to improve community environments;
- Local initiatives are organically grown with strategies specific to the needs of each community;
- YMCA serves as convener in the community and co-leads with partner.

Currently, 190 Ys and their communities are engaged in these initiatives. Participating communities are spread across the country and represent: variety of sizes (urban, rural, suburban), hard-to-reach populations (low-income, underserved, and racial, and ethnic populations), geographic

diversity, and committed leadership at the community-level, including strong YMCA leadership and presence.

Intended Impact

Through these initiatives, community leaders, such as public health officials, mayors, city council members, state legislators, transportation and education officials, voluntary health/disease group partners, hospital executives, philanthropic foundation leaders, city managers, presidents of local businesses, leaders from faith-based community organizations, community advocates, professors and chairs of academic institutions, and executives of chambers of commerce, can help their community to be healthier by:

- Increasing access to and use of attractive and safe locations for physical activity;
- Developing supportive environments to complement and support individual and family efforts to make healthy decisions;
- Providing all students adequate opportunities for physical activity before, during, and after school through recess, intramural activities and other offerings;
- Influencing worksite policies and implementing worksite wellness programs;
- Increasing healthy food choices in restaurants, grocery stores, worksites, schools and other community settings;
- Increasing fruits and vegetables, making community gardens more accessible for community members and increasing the locations and hours of farmers markets;
- Influencing policies such as the requirement of sidewalks and countdown cross signals in neighborhoods;
- Influencing policies to change school foods contracts to include more fruits and vegetables and whole grain foods;
- Reducing the disparities in health and access to opportunities for physical activity and healthy eating in low-income communities.

Partners

The Healthier Communities Initiatives partners with national organizations and federal agencies, including:

Action for Healthy Kids
Active Living by Design
Alliance for a Healthier Generation (AFHG)
American Hospital Association
American Planning Association
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Director of Health Promotion and Education (DHPE)
Food Research Action Center
National Association Chronic Disease Directors (NACDD)

National Association of County and City Health Officials
National League of Cities
National Park Service (NPS)
National Recreation and Park Association
Partnership for Prevention
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Save the Children
Society for Public Health Education (SOPHE)
Stanford Prevention Research Center
Trust for America's Health (TFAH)