



## Portland, OR

▲ Community Example from Chapter 3 of “Lessons for Leaders:”  
*Lessons in Community Engagement for Equity*

### Community Background

Portland has a well-deserved reputation as a friendly environment for walking and bicycling. In addition, a number of progressive nonprofit agencies and local foundations work to improve the availability of affordable healthy food in many underserved neighborhoods. Nevertheless, obstacles persist, which put healthy food and safe places for physical activity out of reach for many of Portland’s most vulnerable residents. In previous decades, city officials incentivized affordable housing. An unintended result has been the concentration of private and publicly supported multi-family housing in East Portland. Today, this area is home to a high proportion of residents living at or below the poverty line as well as non-English-speaking immigrants from many nations.

### Community Action

In 2009, the Oregon Institute for Public Health (OPHI) began its role as lead agency and partnership convener for the *Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities* initiative known in Portland as Healthy Active Communities (HAC). OPHI assembled community development agencies, housing officials, city planners, tenants’ rights advocates, public health professionals, nonprofit advocates and regional funders. HAC formed to address the barriers to healthy eating and active living at and around low-income, multi-family housing developments in East Portland. The partners assessed physical spaces and landlords’ rules regarding amenities for healthy eating and active living. Examples included gardens, bicycle storage, playground equipment, open space and transit access. Due in part to its diversity of organizations, the partnership experienced ongoing tensions that exposed their different perspectives. For example, many

housing advocates felt that low-income tenants faced issues that were more urgent than childhood obesity or access to fresh fruits and vegetables and bike racks, such as asthma and other persistent health concerns. In response, the HAC incorporated other health issues and concerns into their work when it was feasible.

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While the HAC’s focus was in East Portland, they also analyzed relevant city and countywide housing plans, ordinances and other policies that affect rental housing in Portland. The HAC originally aimed to improve government policies to expand access to affordable healthy foods and active living opportunities. But housing officials and city planners were wary of regulations that would deter developers from creating more affordable housing. One potential unintended outcome of more stringent requirements for investors in multi-family housing could be the added expense for healthy eating and active living amenities. Some partners preferred a more direct regulatory approach, while others recommended an educational approach to encourage developers, property managers and landlords to improve rental housing. As a result, HAC partners developed the Healthy Housing Handbook for Portland Property Owners, a web-based handbook with recommendations for creating healthier living environments for residents of multi-family rental housing properties. The partnership hopes that the handbook, and a complementary workshop for private and public housing professionals, is one of many early steps to create healthier housing in Portland.