



San Antonio, TX

▲ Community Example from Chapter 4 of “Lessons for Leaders:”
Lessons in Advancing Policy/Systems Change

Community Background

The *Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities* San Antonio partnership aimed to increase access to healthy food and safe places to be physically active for people in the city’s Westside, where more than 107,000 mostly Hispanic residents live. Safety concerns limited the use of the few existing parks. Food retail options consisted of corner stores that sold processed food and small restaurants selling mostly high-calorie meals.

Community Action

The partnership tried various strategies to address these needs, including shared use agreements with schools, corner store conversions and a program to introduce healthier menu options in restaurants. After hit-and-miss success, the partnership decided on a more strategic and integrated approach that it called Healthy Hubs. The idea was to support at least one healthy eating resource, one physical activity resource, walkability and bikeability, and strong community engagement in a concentrated geographic area. The partnership piloted this idea in the Collins Garden neighborhood because it was near a school and library with an existing park and a nearby corner store. The partners leveraged Communities Putting Prevention to Work (CPPW) funds to make improvements to the park (installation of a shade structure, bike racks and a tennis court backboard) and the walking and biking infrastructure (installation of bike lane striping, bicycle route signage, new sidewalks and curb extensions).

While these were important improvements, the timing of the CPPW funds and the deadline for spending the money rushed the community engagement process. A small and vocal group of residents, who only advocated for their own wishes, dominated the process, stalled progress and negatively influenced the selection of strategies and infrastructure improvements.

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The San Antonio Metropolitan Health District learned from that experience, including understanding the need to build in more time for community engagement. As a result, the health district invested in a new three-year project called the Neighborhood Based Physical Activity and Health Promotion Project. This project focuses on primary prevention strategies to improve the health of children and families and increases community engagement using a neighborhood and community-school partnership approach. Ten selected neighborhoods each have full-time community organizers. Several neighborhoods have clusters of resources that could enable a leveraging effect for impact, like the idea behind Healthy Hubs. Public transit, public housing, healthy food retail and parks are close together. Working with neighbors through the local organizer, residents decide what is needed most to improve health and receive mini-grants that support testing those solutions.