



The Redevelopment of Prospect Village: Health Impacts

Summary

The City of Omaha focuses on revitalizing one neighborhood at a time to best ensure its impact is significant and sustainable. Prospect Village in north Omaha is the priority neighborhood for 2014-2015. The housing improvements and holistic community development work led by the City has health benefits because a large body of research has documented higher rates of death and illness in neighborhoods with concentrated poverty and deteriorating housing. Additional opportunities for creating long-term improvements to the health of the 1,800 residents of Prospect Village include sidewalk repair, leadership training for residents, and a dedicated community garden.

Purpose

The Prospect Village Health Impact Assessment (HIA) studied how long-term health benefits could be achieved in the neighborhood in addition to those already created by the housing rehabilitation and infill housing efforts. An HIA brings together scientific evidence, public health expertise, and stakeholder input to determine collaboratively how health and other community priorities can be improved. The key principle is that decision-making should be grounded in the best available evidence including the effect on health outcomes.

Health Impacts

Numerous neighborhood characteristics including housing condition, affordability, safety, and access to goods and services impact the health of neighborhood residents. Since housing conditions were already being addressed, interviews with key stakeholders who live or work in Prospect Village were conducted to determine what other factors represented the strongest opportunities for achieving health improvements that aligned with neighborhood priorities. **Property maintenance, social connections, and recreational opportunities for children** emerged as the focus areas.

Social Connections – Strong links between neighbors lowers crime through collective efficacy, which is the ability to work together for a common good (such as improved safety). Furthermore, a review of 148 studies found that having good social connections improves mortality equivalent to quitting smoking.

Property Maintenance – Housing directly affects health outcomes through injuries from falls or fires, elevated blood lead levels, and exposure to mold, cockroaches, and other asthma triggers. These items are a focus of the housing improvement work done by the City of Omaha and Omaha Healthy Kids Alliance. Crumbling sidewalks and vacant lots also affect health by decreasing physical activity and increasing injuries and stress related to crime.

Recreational Opportunities for Children – Physical activity increases blood and oxygen flow to areas of the brain that control concentration, memory, and decision-making, which improves educational and behavioral outcomes in children. Being active also builds stronger bones and muscles in children while protecting against diseases like obesity and diabetes. Lastly, physical activity reduces stress by causing the release of endorphins that relieve pain and improve mood. Alternatively, frequent stress keeps the body in a “fight or flight” mode through cortisol and other stress hormones that interfere with digestion, normal blood sugar levels, blood pressure, and the immune system.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are opportunities for the City of Omaha and the Prospect Village Neighborhood Association to further advance both neighborhood priorities and health outcomes in ways that align well with the long-term improvements already being achieved in housing conditions.

1. **Develop a mechanism for repairing sidewalks in Prospect Village and future neighborhoods where the City is focusing its redevelopment efforts.**
2. **Use Prospect Village as a pilot site for neighborhood leadership training that is being created by O.N.E. Omaha.**
3. **Enter into joint use agreements or long-term leases to sustain a dedicated community garden in Prospect Village as well as enhance neighborhood programming at Franklin Elementary.**

Key References

- City of Omaha Planning Department – Housing and Community Development Division. **Prospect Village Neighborhood Redevelopment Plan**. August 2011.
- Center for Community Progress. **Building American Cities Toolkit**. Web. November 2014.
- Active Living Research. **Promoting Physical Activity through the Shared Use of School and Community Recreational Resources**. *The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation*. April 2012.

For more information including longer reports and a full list of references from the Health Impact Assessment, please visit <http://www.douglascountyhealth.com/healthy-community/health-impact-assessments> or contact Andy Wessel, MPH with the Douglas County Health Department at (402) 444-7225 or andy.wessel@douglascounty-ne.gov