

CANADIAN INSTITUTE  
OF PLANNERS



INSTITUT CANADIEN  
DES URBANISTES

# POLICY ON **HEALTHY COMMUNITIES PLANNING**



## POLICY CONTEXT

The relationship between how our communities are designed and the health status of Canadians is ever more salient. Rising levels of inequality, social isolation, food insecurity, sedentary lifestyles, excess traffic, street crime, and lack of affordable housing are all affecting the health and well-being of Canadians. Amplifying these problems are environmental factors such as excessive light, odours, noise, climate change, and pollution. These social and environmental stressors may be contributing to obesity, diabetes, cancer rates, respiratory problems, cardiovascular disease, physical injury, mental disorders, and other major public health problems in Canada. Although genetics, individual choices, and the limitations of the health care system undoubtedly contribute to these health challenges, there is now ample evidence that community design also plays a major role.

As professionals concerned with the shaping of the built, natural, and social environment, planners can contribute to creating healthy communities. They can promote the conditions under which community and individual health and well-being can be improved, while increasing prosperity, and social and health equity. This includes decisions regarding land use, urban design, housing supply, transportation infrastructure, and the location of services and green spaces. Planners are trained to see a community holistically, and are in a unique position to integrate diverse perspectives, collaborate with a wide variety of allied professionals and stakeholders, and bring solutions to the table that demonstrate the principles of healthy community planning. Professionals involved in planning our communities can thereby have a profound and lasting impact on the health and well-being of citizens.

### WHAT IS A HEALTHY COMMUNITY?

Our understanding of healthy communities is evolving as knowledge of the **social, economic, and ecological determinants of public health** develops. In this policy, a healthy community is defined as “a place where healthy built, social, economic, and natural environments give citizens the opportunity to live to their full potential,”<sup>1</sup> regardless of their socially, culturally, or economically defined circumstances. A healthy community allows “people to come together to make their community better for themselves, their family, their friends, their neighbours, and others. A healthy community creates ongoing dialogue, generates leadership opportunities for all, embraces diversity, connects people and resources, fosters a sense of community, and shapes its own future.”<sup>2</sup>

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1 Adapted from American Planning Association (2017) Healthy Communities Policy Guide.

2 Adapted from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (2013).





## POLICY GOAL

The Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP) envisions a future where all communities and cities are planned, designed, developed, and managed to foster vibrant environments and active lifestyles that promote and protect the health of all Canadians, increasing the social and health equity of our communities.



## POLICY OBJECTIVES

To achieve the Healthy Communities Policy goal, CIP supports the following objectives for the built, natural, and social environments:

### BUILT ENVIRONMENT

- ◆ Compact, interconnected development and mixed land uses are promoted to support improved services and amenities, and reduce car dependence.
- ◆ Recreational facilities, health services, food stores, and other built-environment features that influence health and well-being are accessible to and affordable for all citizens.
- ◆ Active and public transportation infrastructure is universally accessible, safe, affordable, and takes into account local climate conditions.
- ◆ Streets are designed to accommodate the safe cohabitation of all road users, with particular attention to the safety and comfort of the most vulnerable in both rural and urban contexts.
- ◆ Planning for a rich public realm is promoted, composed of public spaces that are human scale, aesthetically pleasing, culturally appropriate, safe, and accessible to all citizens, thereby creating socially inclusive and cohesive communities.

- ◆ Rural, northern, remote, and urban Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities have suitable, affordable, and adequate housing options and services for all ages, abilities, and social groups.
- ◆ Design of public spaces and neighbourhoods promotes safety, social connection, accessibility, and well-being, while limiting opportunities for crime and victimization.



## NATURAL AND RURAL ENVIRONMENT

- ◆ Planning recognizes the importance of preserving and regenerating natural environments for health and well-being.
- ◆ Planning practices promote active lifestyles by ensuring an adequate distribution of well-designed green spaces, increasing the connectivity of green spaces, and improving access to natural environments in an equitable manner.
- ◆ Action is taken to help improve local air, land, and water quality and minimize the impacts of exposure to pollutants and contaminants.
- ◆ Natural habitat is protected to ensure biodiversity and healthy ecosystems.
- ◆ Urban agriculture is promoted to help ensure access to an adequate supply of healthy food.
- ◆ Vegetation is promoted on roofs and ground surfaces to help eliminate urban heat islands.
- ◆ Local, provincial/territorial, and federal planning jurisdictions take steps to manage the long-term health effects associated with global ecological change, including climate change.



## SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

- ◆ Strong, inclusive, and resilient communities support the social development and well-being of all citizens, and reduce social and health inequities.
- ◆ Social and health equity considerations are incorporated into all healthy community strategies and decisions made by planners.
- ◆ The public has year-round access to services and facilities providing safe active and passive places to engage in healthy physical activity, to be outside, connect socially, and build community.
- ◆ Healthy community planning recognizes the diverse needs of those living in rural, northern, remote, and urban Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.
- ◆ Local Indigenous knowledge and planning traditions are integrated into planning processes, respecting the rights of Indigenous peoples.
- ◆ Local community groups and citizens are informed and empowered, allowing them to engage in the planning process and implement neighbourhood-scale improvements.


## THE ROLE OF PLANNERS

CIP recognizes that planners have a responsibility to plan and make decisions in a way that engages the public, is broadly collaborative with other professions, and supports the development of healthy, equitable, and inclusive communities. Accordingly, planners have the following professional obligations:

### ENSURE EFFECTIVE DECISIONS

- ◆ Use their influence to increase social and health equity and actively work towards meaningful public engagement, social and cultural inclusion, and to reduce inequities in all planning processes.
- ◆ Understand the potential effects of the determinants of health, particularly of the built environment on community health.
- ◆ Be knowledgeable about scientific research and data availability to ensure their planning decisions are both evidenced-informed and appropriate.
- ◆ Be knowledgeable about international policies, frameworks, and targets relevant to healthy community outcomes, such as the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda.



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- ◆ Make decisions according to healthy community planning principles and work to increase equitable outcomes, especially where income and resource disparities are extreme.
  - ◆ Assess the impacts of proposed decisions to ensure they will enhance the health, well-being, and quality of life of all citizens, while ensuring environmental and fiscal sustainability.
  - ◆ Gather local knowledge to inform planning processes and to ensure decisions and interventions are locally appropriate and address community needs.
  - ◆ Ensure the transparency of the decision-making process and public accessibility to data to improve community engagement and accountability.
  - ◆ Model environmentally responsible decision-making in their professional practices.

#### COLLABORATE ACROSS SECTORS

- ◆ Collaborate across sectors, departments, and jurisdictions to ensure an integrated and comprehensive approach to planning healthy communities, as well as effective implementation of healthy community policies.
- ◆ Collaborate with each other and with other professionals – such as public health practitioners, architects, landscape architects, urban designers, and transportation engineers – to create healthy communities.
- ◆ Coordinate research efforts on healthy communities with public health agencies and share health data and research results.
- ◆ Collaborate with public health agencies to translate research results into publicly accessible language and communicate the benefits of planning for healthy communities to the general public and elected officials.
- ◆ Seek to develop a shared language and working relationships with other professionals engaged in healthy community issues and avoid siloed or compartmentalized approaches.
- ◆ Collaborate with health professionals to monitor whether changes in the built environment are being translated into desired health outcomes over time, and revise plans and policies accordingly.



## ENGAGE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE, STAKEHOLDERS, YOUTH, AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC

- ◆ Consult and engage elected officials and leaders, the private sector, Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, youth, and the general public regularly to ensure their perspectives are fully taken into account in healthy community solutions.
- ◆ Be inclusive and respectful of Indigenous peoples, striving to promote understanding, validation, and respect of Indigenous knowledge and cultural practices to ensure decisions and interventions are culturally relevant and appropriate.
- ◆ Strive to use engagement opportunities and the planning process to foster social and cultural inclusion.
- ◆ Be ready to experiment with innovative methods and technologies for engaging and collaborating with the public and special interest groups.
- ◆ Build on CIP's national-level work to improve public awareness of – and support for – healthy communities, by drawing attention to the multiple benefits of healthy community solutions.
- ◆ Communicate information to elected officials and the public on how planning for healthy communities will bring short-, medium- and long-term returns on investment for communities and government, and how the built environment influences health.

### **CALL TO ACTION**

CIP recognizes that all planners have a responsibility to plan and support the development of healthy communities and make decisions according to the principles of healthy community planning. CIP is committed to working to ensure that practicing planners have access to the resources, data, training, and other support they need to incorporate planning for healthy community principles in their work. CIP is also committed to collaborating with other professions, planning associations and governments, stakeholders and the general public to help address the health challenges that Canadians are facing.





## THE ROLE OF CIP

CIP recognizes that planning for healthy communities is planning for the public interest. To support implementation of the policy, CIP will undertake the following actions to ensure the organization contributes to the health, well-being, and quality of life for all Canadian citizens:

- ◆ Promote the vision of a healthy community in its communications, policy advocacy, educational standards, professional development activities, and its work with other professions.
- ◆ Make developing and deepening partnerships with other professional organizations a priority in its approach to planning health communities.
- ◆ Ensure that practicing planners have access to the resources, data, training, and other support they need to fully integrate a healthy community lens into their work.
- ◆ Advocate for international and federal policies and actions that will contribute to healthier communities.
- ◆ Consider additional implementation priorities, based on an annual environmental scan and membership survey.







## ABOUT THIS POLICY

The Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP) is a professional body that works on behalf of over 6,900 members nationally and has served as the voice of Canada’s planning community since 1919. CIP’s policies guide the organization’s daily work and special initiatives to advance best practices in Canadian professional planning.

This policy was led by the CIP Healthy Community Committee and developed through thoughtful and extensive consultation with professional planners, planning and health practitioners, academics, and other experts in the healthy community field using interviews, surveys, and focus groups. The policy was ratified by the CIP Board of Directors in November of 2018.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For additional resources on healthy communities produced by CIP, including a Healthy Communities Annotated Bibliography, reports on different healthy community topics, and a Healthy Communities Practice Guide, etc., please see the [CIP Healthy Communities webpage](#).



## KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**Active transportation:** Active transportation refers to any form of human-powered transportation (e.g., walking, cycling, using a wheelchair, in-line skating or skateboarding).

**Built environment:** The built environment is part of our physical surroundings and includes the buildings, parks, schools, road systems, and other infrastructure encountered by citizens.

**Natural environment:** Encompasses the interaction of all living species, climate, weather, and natural resources that affect human survival and economic activity.

**Social environment:** Human social environments encompass the immediate physical surroundings, social relationships, and cultural milieus within which defined groups of people function and interact.

**Determinants of health:** The social and economic determinants of health are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. These circumstances are shaped by the distribution of money, power and resources at global, national and local levels. The ecological determinants of health include air, water, ecological processes, natural resources, building materials, energy, and a climate conducive to the health of human and other life forms.

**Social and health equity:** Implies that ideally everyone should have a fair opportunity to attain their full social and health potential and that no one should be disadvantaged from achieving this potential.

**Mixed-land use:** Involves a range of complementary land uses that are located together in a balanced mix, including residential development, shops, employment community and recreation facilities and parks and open space.

**Public health:** The art and science of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through the organized efforts of society.



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