



IMPACT OF THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP ACADEMY FOR THE PUBLIC'S HEALTH

CENTER FOR COMMUNITY HEALTH AND EVALUATION
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Healthy policies: NLAPH supports leaders for change

An NLAPH team in Sacramento County developed policies to promote health, climate resilience, environmental justice, and equity in the built environment

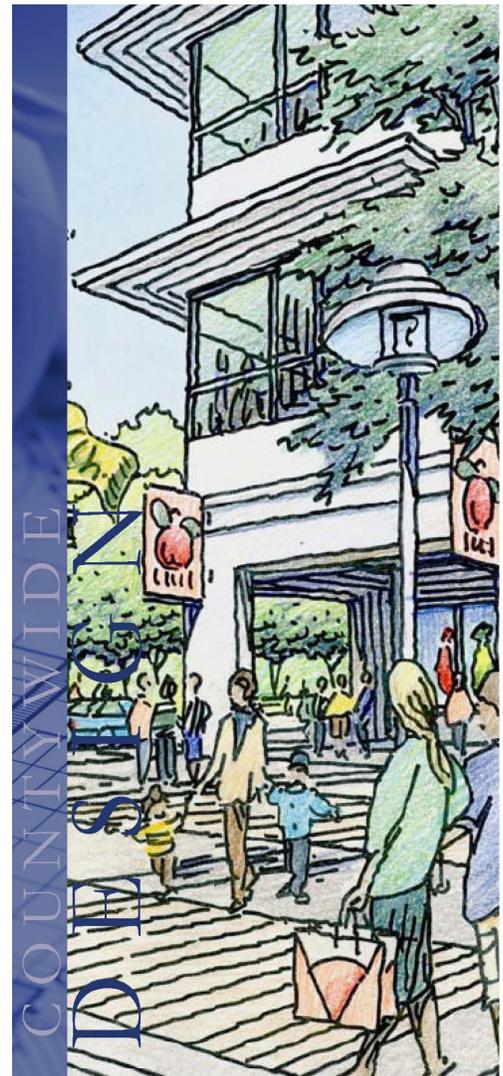
The National Leadership Academy for the Public's Health (NLAPH) is a one-year applied leadership training program for cross-sector teams located across the United States. As part of the program, teams implement action learning projects to build capacity and improve community health and health equity.

In 2013, an NLAPH team called [Design 4 Active Sacramento \(D4AS\)](#) in Sacramento, California engaged in a successful action learning project focused on influencing the county's comprehensive planning process. Their story provides an illustrative example for how both cross-sector coalitions can advance policy change and the contribution of NLAPH to building teams' capacity to create meaningful changes in their communities.

The team's active design appendix, housing element, zoning code recommendations, and recommendations to include active design requirements in the countywide design guidelines were adopted in the final development plan that will guide development in Sacramento County for many years. The team's work paved the way for policies that will make the county healthier and more active for its residents for decades to come.

In the seven years since participation, this team has continued to expand their reach and influence on public health, built environment policies, climate resilience, environmental justice, and equity. They have made significant contributions to many regional and statewide policy decisions and team members sit on a number of influential policy committees and commissions at the city, county, regional, and state levels.

This team's experience illustrates how cross-sector collaboration is an effective approach for addressing complex community needs through policy change.



Background

Policy change is developed along a spectrum of activities: [pre-policy](#) (clearly defining the problem or solutions), [policy development](#) (building political will), [policy](#) (influencing decisions on a specific policy), and [policy implementation](#) (ensuring effective implementation of a policy).¹ Through its curriculum and coaching, NLAPH helps cross-sector teams advance their policy priorities along the entire spectrum. Through policy change, teams are having a positive impact on health and well-being in their communities.

In 2013, an NLAPH team in Sacramento, California successfully influenced several components of the county's comprehensive plan that will have a long-term impact on development decisions that impact health, healthy communities, and quality of life.

Design for Active Sacramento

Design 4 Active Sacramento (D4AS) was convened to participate in NLAPH. Team members had worked together before, but not on a community health improvement project. The original team included a county land use planner specializing in climate change & sustainability, the county public health officer, a nonprofit executive director, a transportation civil engineer, a regional public information coordinator, and a neurosurgeon. The team had strong support and participation from leadership at the Sacramento County Department of Public Health and the Community Development Department during NLAPH participation.

“ We established D4AS to improve health outcomes in Sacramento communities by influencing the policies and systems of the built environment that impact our health.

— D4AS team member

D4AS took advantage of an opportunity to make a difference in Sacramento County, with a population well over one-half million, and its development plan (including the housing element) and zoning code. The county's Comprehensive General Plan (2005-2030) provides a long-term vision for zoning, land use, and development in local communities. The zoning code and companion design guidelines are used to operationalize the general plan. In 2013, concurrent with D4AS's NLAPH participation, the county began a major overhaul of the zoning code for the first time in more than 30 years. D4AS's NLAPH action learning project focused on influencing several components of the comprehensive planning process.

The D4AS team came to NLAPH well-positioned for influencing the general plan and zoning code. They had the necessary skills and expertise in planning, active living design, transportation, and public health, as well as pre-existing relationships with other public and private sector organizations. Members of this team also had been involved with a similar effort in the community—a local transportation corridor plan that was incorporating health into a project advancing public policy to

¹ Ottoson JM, Green LW, Beery WL, Senter SK, Cahill CL, Pearson DC, Greenwald HP, Hamre R, Leviton L. Policy-contribution assessment and field-building analysis of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Active Living Research Program. *Am J Prev Med.* 2009 Feb;36(2 Suppl):S34-43. doi: 10.1016/j.amepre.2008.10.010

create better transit options for community members. The team's members also had the authority to influence decisions, were politically savvy, and brought a long-term perspective to their work. All of these qualities have been shown to boost success in the NLAPH training program.² While the team came into NLAPH with a lot of assets, team members reported that through NLAPH they grew as leaders, cemented a foundation for teamwork into the future, and were able to influence tangible policy changes.

“ The NLAPH program forced us to think clearly about our goal and our vision. I think it was our ability to communicate those things clearly that helped enhance our connections and build our network.

— D4AS team member

While each team member had experience working on policy change, participating in NLAPH gave them an opportunity to work on a specific community health improvement project. The D4AS team credits NLAPH with bringing the members together, focusing their action learning project, and catalyzing effective collaboration with the support of their coach. Team members grew individually and reported improvements in their ability to partner, lead collectively, and reach out to new or different groups. The collaborative approach emphasized by NLAPH—sharing ownership and learning from each other—was critical for their success. D4AS also took advantage of relationships made during the NLAPH year to connect with other teams and share information.

D4AS has expanded and, at the time of this report, continues to work together and meet at least quarterly to plan for the future and reflect on recent work.

Influencing policies for healthier communities

The D4AS team spent its NLAPH year, in 2013, focused both on growing as leaders and on leveraging existing investments, connections, and momentum to advance health through active design policy in Sacramento County. Through this work, they engaged in multiple stages of the policy spectrum in an iterative cycle of policy change activities.

Pre-policy: Clearly defining the problem or solutions

The D4AS team was committed to “participatory placemaking,” that is a collaborative, community-based urban design that emphasizes place-specific shared values.³ Through previous work on a local area plan the team had expertise and experience working in the policy arena. NLAPH participation required them to articulate a clear vision for their work, which helped them to stay focused and make progress.

² *Impact of the National Leadership Academy for the Public's Health: A Cross-case Analysis of 21 Participating Teams*. Seattle: Center for Community Health and Evaluation, July 2015

³ Project for Public Spaces. *What is Placemaking?* http://www.pps.org/reference/what_is_placemaking/

Policy development: Building political will

Policies are developed within social, economic and political contexts. Many players compete to secure a place on the decision-making agenda, so building support with key stakeholders is critical. During NLAPH, the D4AS team increased policymakers' awareness of the impact the built environment has on the public's physical and mental health and that using a health lens can improve health outcomes. Through active living design, the possibilities for influencing the comprehensive land use and transportation planning process and related policies were achieved in several ways:

Building a network: The team viewed active living design as “a solution that the entire community can get involved in.” The team's work resulted in expanded networks and invitations for long-term relationships with other groups working in active living design—the team became seen as experts and allies.

” Instead of starting at the top of the food chain and working our way down, we're building the political will from the bottom up.

— D4AS team member

To expand their reach, influence, and networks, the team also recruited additional members, including other physicians (including two from public health), their NLAPH coach (who lived in the community), and a former landscape architect who has since become an Assistant Professor at Northeastern University teaching and researching on the connections between landscape, human health, urban ecology, and design. Her current book in progress, *The Topography of Wellness: Health and the American Urban Landscape*, examines landscape responses to six historical urban epidemics, including COVID, and the implication for current and future practice.

The D4AS team reported that as they worked to build support and engage decision makers, participation in NLAPH provided a level of credibility that elevated their work in the eyes of key stakeholders. This success is evidenced in the fact that D4AS members now hold positions on a number of influential policy committees and commissions. For example, a few members were recruited to sit on the Sacramento City and County environmental justice committees and others have joined a Mayors' Climate Commission established by the mayors of City of Sacramento and West Sacramento to develop policies that integrate climate resilience, health in the built environment, transportation, and equity. Another team member leads a regional Zero-emission Vehicle Collaborative where new programs such as “Our Community Car Share” in affordable housing communities are freely available to residents to help address barriers to health by meeting their transportation needs for doctor appointments, dialysis, pharmacy, grocery shopping without having to own a car. D4AS team members were also called upon by former Governor Brown as important advisors for his statewide Health in All Policies executive order.

Building awareness/educating decision makers: The D4AS team's extensive outreach connected them to influential audiences in myriad ways, including engaging population health leaders at 10 area hospitals, making presentations at a number of regional, state, and national conferences, and publishing a journal article about the role of public-private partnerships in active neighborhood design.

They continue to build political will and awareness of active design. For example, the team presented the active design guidelines and new Housing Element Policies to the California Office of Planning and Research, Active Living Research conference, New York City's FitCity conference, and at the California Department of Public Health's Chronic Disease Prevention Conference. At the time of this report, D4AS was working on a national resource exchange website to share best practices and guidelines.

Leveraging funding: The NLAPH work generated funding during the training year—a grant from California's Strategic Growth Council—which supported educational presentations, technical assistance and review of pedestrian/ bicycle projects and design guidelines for other jurisdictions in the region.

Using expertise to expand work to other policies: In recent years, D4AS has expanded into work on climate policy. Its members have engaged with the Capital Region Climate Readiness Collaborative (CRC), a regional climate adaptation collaborative for the 6 county Sacramento region. They have been providing technical assistance to the group to help embed climate change considerations into regional built environment policies. They also elevated the priority of health and equity to be included in addressing climate change policies. Without this, key climate policies could worsen health outcomes. The Sacramento County Public Health Officer, who is also a D4AS team member started embedding more health presence into built environment arenas. She designated a health educator on her staff to participate as a Steering Committee member on the CRC to help inform health as a component of climate policy.

Policy: Influencing decisions on a specific policy

Policy change occurs when preparation meets opportunity. In Sacramento County, NLAPH provided training, coaching, and time to devote to the policy groundwork, so the team was prepared to respond to the opportunity to influence the comprehensive plan.

The D4AS team also had the right people involved to give the team credibility and take advantage of this opportunity. For example, the team member from Sacramento County planning leadership was committed to active living design and recognized how it aligned with goals set by the Department of Community Development, and the presence of the Public Health Officer on the team helped convince elected officials that the work was important for improving community health. This leadership support combined with committed partners and leaders from other sectors and a deep understanding of active living design principles positioned this team to successfully influence policy.

D4AS delivered actionable policy and design recommendations that were based on established best practices, research, professional experience, and input from the community. D4AS was successful at advancing its policy priorities, including:

Housing element 2013–2021. Successful incorporation of language to make healthy communities a goal for housing and neighborhoods in Sacramento’s housing element. This language promotes public health, safety, and livability through community design and shaping the built environment.

Design guidelines. Successful addition of a section (Appendix D) of the countywide design guidelines that describes active design and how to incorporate active design features into development projects to promote physical activity and health, both physical and mental. New developments and projects within Sacramento county limits must now include active design elements in all projects. Additionally, these guidelines advance sustainability and reduce climate change impacts.

Zoning code. All new development and uses must comply with Sacramento County’s Development Code and Design Guidelines to increase the focus on health and the built environment and emphasize active design and sustainability. In July 2015, after a three-year process, the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors officially adopted the first major update to the county’s development code in 30 years. The zoning and development code and the active design guidelines—informed by D4As efforts—now apply to all land uses, including residential, commercial, and industrial.

Environmental Justice. In 2017, D4AS helped advance California state’s Senate Bill 1000, a mandatory requirement that all jurisdictions include environmental justice policies into their comprehensive plans. D4AS was recruited to contribute to development of those plans and drive positive health outcomes in traditionally disadvantaged communities.

Developer Fee. D4AS worked with county officials to create a countywide developer fee that funds an employee of the Department of Public Health to sit on the County Design Review Advisory Committee. The committee has the authority to mandate compliance with active design guidelines and public health priorities from the comprehensive plan (see more below in Policy implementation).

Policy implementation: Ensuring effective implementation of a policy

To achieve health impact, it is important to monitor the extent to which policies were implemented as planned. The team has also partnered in the monitoring and implementation of the general plan and zoning code.

Healthy communities is a goal for housing and neighborhoods in the Housing Element.



SACRAMENTO COUNTY
HOUSING
ELEMENT OF 2013-2021



Sacramento County
Department of Community Development



The Sacramento Countywide Design Guidelines include an “Active Design” guide (Appendix D).

Active Design shall be incorporated into all projects in order to reinforce the community’s and County’s goal to create a built environment that is sustainable, livable, and promotes active transportation choices such as walking, bicycling, and access transit.



Local change. D4AS used the zoning code and design guidelines to influence a gas station renovation, resulting in the removal of gas pumps and an increase in healthy foods available in the store located in a disadvantaged community. The healthy food policy is now regularly used in all convenience store development applications.

“ Individually and collectively, our team members have become national experts and leaders in the areas of healthy communities and health and the built environment. We are one of California’s ‘go to’ groups to seek policy advice or technical assistance for supporting and advancing health and equity initiatives.

— D4AS team member

Shaping the future. A health department staff member participates on the County Design Review Advisory Committee. The committee reviews all planning projects in the county and this staff member works to make sure they address the public health outcome goals and meet the active design guidelines in the comprehensive plan that D4AS developed during their NLAPH program year. D4AS also convened Planning Directors and Public Health Officers from eight counties across the region to meet and discuss how Planning policies influence health outcomes. Convenings and follow-up with each county occurred over two years to help solidify relationships between health and planning and to become more collaborative and inclusive in policymaking and implementation.

New resources and enhanced capacity for sustainability

The D4AS team came to NLAPH with the support of team members’ respective organizations. After NLAPH, they were also able to generate new resources to leverage and sustain their work going forward. In 2016, D4AS and its coalition partners were awarded a national Plan4Health grant in conjunction with the California chapter of the American Planning Association. This funding advanced coordination between the staffs of city and county planning and public health departments and built upon the D4AS’s work in the county. Over the course of two years, D4AS provided relationship-building, support and technical assistance that led to seven counties in the region earning grants from the state’s active transportation program.

The team developed a strategic plan and created an organization under the umbrella of the nonprofit, WALKSacramento. This innovative move created a focused entity for continued active design work apart from the participants’ organizations. The organization has grown in funding and scale of impact and, in late 2019, completed a new round of strategic planning to articulate broader vision, mission, and strategy goals that focus well beyond walkability to many issues including climate, environmental justice and equity. WALKSacramento has also expanded the range of products and services it provides, such as a national resource exchange website and technical assistance for grant applications and policy advocacy.

Having an independent home for D4AS’s active design work increases WALKSacramento’s reach into the community and across the state, and strengthens its ability to incorporate healthy, active design into both public and private sector projects.

Summary

The D4AS example illustrates how an NLAPH team can use its participation in the program to advance policies that will make the community healthier.

This team, one of more than 130 NLAPH teams that have participated since 2012, shows what can happen when visionary leaders have a focused opportunity to work across sectors and take advantage of policy opportunities.

NLAPH capitalizes on the skills and relationships individuals bring to the work and builds on these to empower leaders to create community change. Since their program year, D4AS team members have developed a reputation as experts on issues like healthy built environments, climate resilience, equity, and coordination between public agencies to improve community health. D4AS created and grew an independent 501(c)3 organization that allows them to attract resources independently of the members' agencies and participate in direct policy advocacy. The team remains active and continues to advance its policy priorities. Their work regularly extends well beyond Sacramento and the team has influenced regional and statewide policies that will shape communities for years to come.

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Other NLAPH teams have also seen impressive policy change results from their action learning projects. A few additional examples include:

Childhood immunizations in Arizona

When a change in federal law threw vaccine reimbursement practices into disarray, this NLAPH team leveraged their content expertise and professional networks to advocate and plan for change—using custom messaging for different audiences and a data-driven approach—for changes in state policies that increased reimbursement rates and improved access to vaccinations for juveniles, particularly those receiving “safety net” services.

The team worked with health plans to increase reimbursement rates from below the cost of the vaccines to 118% to 126% of the cost to cover storage, handling, insurance, and loss.

The team advocated for—and got passed—legislation requiring health plans to reimburse health departments for insured children who came into public health clinics for vaccinations.

The team established a centralized billing office for vaccinations so every participating county could get reimbursement without creating and funding their own billing department. Ninety-five percent of the state’s counties participate, and the office has brought in nearly \$25 million in revenue over the past seven years that goes right back to public health clinics to cover the cost of purchasing more vaccines for additional children. After their success, the team has been replicating the centralized billing system for behavioral health and other services.

Smoke-free housing in New York

The Queens Tobacco Control Coalition, an NLAPH team in the New York City borough of Queens, advocated for smoke-free multi-unit housing by building relationships and awareness with real estate developers, management companies, landlords, and community boards. As a direct result of its efforts, by 2015, well over 2,000 new or existing residences within multi-unit housing developments have been converted to or designated as smoke-free.

After NLAPH participation, the coalition continued to work with developers and landlords to increase the number of smoke-free housing units, including providing significant leadership in transitioning a 1,844 unit co-op housing complex into New York State’s largest smoke-free apartment building complex. The team’s efforts have also led to 10 of the 14 Queens’ Community Boards passing smoke-free housing resolutions. They reported that the momentum they have created has begun to spread to the boroughs of the Bronx and Brooklyn.