Healthy Community: Issue Brief

Bridging Gaps in Local Public Health and Infrastructure

Summary

When a new employer or development moves to a community, the associated financial benefits go far beyond the new jobs created or an increased tax base. In fact, businesses and developers are routinely investing in the community's future and public health. The economic prosperity that comes with development is associated with an improved wellbeing for the entire community, as economic growth is associated with healthier lifestyles. In addition to this, large developers and employers are directly investing in their communities, many funding programs dedicated to a cleaner environment and overall community health. Research has shown that when the local community is healthy and strong, businesses are more productive, so there is real incentive in investing in community health. When a new developer or employer invests in the local economy and overall health of the community, they maintain a good reputation and ensure a healthy workforce, while residents in that community have more resources to invest in their health.

Background

Everyone wants to be healthy, but it seems as though achieving health becomes harder to attain each year. The surgeon general identified seven key components to a healthy life: basic needs for health and safety, meaningful work and wealth, humane housing, reliable transportation, a thriving natural world, lifelong learning, and belonging and civic participation **(6. Community Health and Economic Prosperity).** While some argue that new development can interfere with a community's health, the opposite is true in most cases of responsible development. This is because new development can increase the local economy, allowing residents more resources to invest in their health, while the new employers actively invest in the overall health of the community to uphold a positive reputation and maintain a healthy workforce.

Increase in Local Economy is an Increase in Health

According to research, 90% of the $4.3 trillion that Americans spend each year on healthcare is associated with chronic diseases that are largely preventable by lifestyle improvements. Only 2.7% of U.S adults are meeting all four criteria specified for a healthy lifestyle. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle has proven to be one of the most effective ways to ward off chronic diseases, as women with healthy lifestyles have one-seventh the risk of cardiovascular disease and one-fourth to one-third the risk of heart failure compared to women who did not meet those criteria. Routinely practicing healthy lifestyle behaviors can prevent up to 82% of coronary heart disease cases, and 91% of type 2 diabetes cases. Additionally, for veterans, a study found that practicing low-risk lifestyle factors was associated with an 87% lower risk of death. Health is obviously important, but it is expensive and it depends on conditions outside the healthcare system including economic circumstances and access to safe places for routine physical activity. When a local community does not have the financial resources to provide safe areas and essential resources for residents to maintain health, the ability for residents to engage in healthy behaviors significantly decreases. When the local community experiences a surge in economic activity from new development, more money can be invested in those resources. Additionally, studies have shown that residents significantly benefit financially from new development, further enabling them the financial resources to stay healthy, whether that be healthier food, a gym membership, or access to routine medical checks **(Population Health: The Power of Prevention (2025).**

Economic opportunity is connected with physical and social environments that support overall well-being (**6. Community Health and Economic Prosperity: A Report of the Surgeon General (2021).** In other words, when a city lands a new development the associated financial benefits go far beyond the local economy, positively affecting community health as well.

Increase in Local Economy is an Increase in Health Cont.

Engaged companies also shape everyday lives in their communities. According to research, more than 17 million U.S. jobs are supported by large private companies. These companies also contribute more than $3.1 trillion to the national economy, generating $1.7 trillion of personal income for workers. These large private companies also contribute about 10% of to state GDP. Large companies, those with at least 500 employees, support about one in every 10 jobs in the nation. Substantial contributors to employment, household income, and regional economies, large private companies also influence local supply chains, innovation, investment, and opportunities for economic advancement. These companies commonly pursue long-term investments aimed at resilience, stability, and growth, and their economic influence and investments go far beyond their employees, extending to local businesses and households. Attracting investment and business greatly improves a community's long-term prosperity, and when financial prosperity envelops a community, residents likewise have more access to a healthy lifestyle **(How Large Private Companies Shape Everyday Life (2024).**

Businesses Contribute Significantly to Employee Health and Every Day Life

When an employer or development moves into a community, employee health is a priority. Research has found that U.S. employers lost $179 billion annually as a result of reduced productivity due to excessive alcohol consumption. It was also found that employees who received a diagnosis of depression missed about 68 million more work days each year than the workforce without that diagnosis. U.S. employers lose $23 billion each year because of those missed workdays. The health of employees in addition to the health of the communities where an employer operates are connected. This is why so many large employers are investing in community health. Such investments may benefit the business through improved recruitment, retention, employee productivity, and community reputation.

Businesses Contribute Significantly to Employee Health and Every Day Life Cont.

These investments are going beyond company walls, as more businesses are working with government agencies and nonprofit organizations to address health issues outside company property. Put simply, businesses and developers are not only considering, but investing in community conditions because when the community is healthy, the workers will be healthy, and when the workers are healthy, business is more productive and lucrative (**4. The ROI of Health and Well-Being: Business Investment in Healthier Communities (2017).**

Overall community health depends on much more than healthcare access. Other factors contribute greatly to community health such as educational opportunity, environmental conditions, and economic stability. Businesses and new development have the ability to influence all these factors when they move to a new community, and those new employers actually have incentives to financially and operationally support community health because it largely affects their own productivity, employee retention, operational reliability, and long-term business performance. New development does not just bring the initial financial benefits to a neighborhood, as best business practice is to also invest in community health. When businesses collaborate with government agencies, educational institutions, healthcare organizations, and other community stakeholders, community health experiences vast improvement **(3. The Business Role in Improving Health: Beyond Social Responsibility (2013).**

Practicing Corporate Social Responsibility

Employers and developments are committing to corporate social responsibility, the idea that joining a community means investing in its future. There is a growing interest among corporations in integrative environmental governance and community health in their local investments. Corporate social responsibility is increasingly expected for developers and employers and implemented as a driver of sustainable development and a complementary mechanism for public health promotion. It ultimately links business practices with environmental quality, occupational safety, and overall community wellbeing.

Practicing Corporate Social Responsibility Cont.

Corporate environmental responsibility does not mean a business is simply minimizing its immediate operational impacts. Rather, this new practice occurs when businesses also include community health, environmental protection, and sustainable resource management in their investment and priorities. Such businesses will commonly roll-out different programs to take care of the community. For example, corporate responsibility programs focusing on public-health commonly address both environmental and social risks simultaneously. Other corporate examples involve water and sanitation initiatives, carbon-footprint management, reduced chemical exposure, and local air-quality improvements. New large employers and developers are more commonly investing in environmental and public-health, working to prevent pollution, protect resources, and improve daily life not just for the business, but for the larger community **(1. Beyond the Core Business: Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental–Health Integration for Sustainable and Healthy Communities (2026).**

When the communities welcoming development also have set standards protecting neighborhoods and natural resources, in addition to policies on development that require accountability, environmental oversight, and prioritize protecting families and future generations, they ensure new developers are doing what they are already practicing– keeping communities healthy. Research has shown that community health, environmental protection, and economic development are interconnected, and that's why so many developers are accepting their responsibility to invest in overall community health. At the end of the day, it's proven to be the best for business and the community, so when new developers invest in community health, everyone wins.

Works Cited

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