

*Making suburban Cook County  
a healthier place to live, work and play.*

**Communities Putting Prevention to Work**  
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## What Is ‘Policy, Systems and Environmental Change’?

Policy, systems and environmental change is a new way of thinking about how to effectively improve health in a community. For many years, health programs have focused on individual behavior, assuming that if you teach people what will make them healthy, they will find a way to do it. Unfortunately, being healthy is not just about individual choices.

Today, we’re realizing that it’s not enough to know how to be healthy – you need practical, readily available healthy options around you. That’s where policy, systems and environmental change comes in.

### What Is Policy, Systems and Environmental Change?

Policy, systems and environmental change is a way of modifying the environment to make healthy choices practical and available to all community members. By changing laws and shaping physical landscapes, a big impact can be made with little time and resources. By changing policies, systems and/or environments, communities can help tackle health issues like obesity, diabetes, cancer and other chronic diseases.

### Why is Policy, Systems and Environmental Change Important?

Where you live affects how you live - you simply can’t make healthy decisions if healthy options aren’t available to you. Policy, systems and environmental change makes healthier choices a real, feasible option for every community member by looking at the laws, rules and environments that impact our behavior.

### What’s the Difference Between Policy, Systems and Environmental Change and Programs?

Setting	Programs/Events	Policy, Systems and Environmental Change
School	Celebrate national nutrition month	Add fruits and vegetables to the a la carte options in schools
Community	Host a community bike ride and parade	Implement a Complete Streets policy to ensure community roads are constructed for safe biking, walking and driving
Worksite	Hold health screenings for staff	Implement a healthy vending machine policy that offers healthy snacks at an affordable price
Hospital	Hold free breastfeeding courses for new moms	Implement the WHO 10 Steps to Successful Breastfeeding and become a baby friendly hospital

## About Policy Change

- Policy change includes the passing of laws, ordinances, resolutions, mandates, regulations, or rules.
- Government bodies (federal, state, local level), school districts and schools, park districts, healthcare organizations (hospitals, health systems), worksites and other community institutions (jails, daycare centers, senior living centers, faith institutions) all make policy change.
- Policies greatly influence the choices we make in our lives. Laws that are passed (like workplace policies, school policies) greatly influence the daily decisions we make about our health.
- Examples: Adding a tax on unhealthy food, passing a law allowing residents to plant community gardens in vacant lots, schools establishing a policy that prohibits junk food in school fundraising drives.

## About Systems Change

- System change involves change made to the rules within an organization. Systems change and policy change often work hand-in-hand.
- Systems change impacts all elements of an organization. Often systems change focuses on changing infrastructure within a school, park, worksite or health setting.
- Examples: Creating a community plan to account for health impacts of new projects, creating a certification system for school bake sales to ensure they are in line with school wellness policy.

## About Environmental Change

- Environmental change is a change made to the physical environment.
- Environmental change can be as simple as installing bike signage on already established bike routes or as complex as sidewalk installation and pedestrian friendly intersections to promote walking and biking among its citizens.
- Examples: Municipality undertakes a planning process to ensure better pedestrian and bicycle access to main roads and parks; community development includes neighborhood corridors with pedestrian accommodations meeting the needs of seniors (e.g. adequate benches and ramped sidewalks).

## About Us

Communities Putting Prevention to Work (CPPW) is an initiative led by the Public Health Institute of Metropolitan Chicago and the Cook County Department of Public Health. With support from partners throughout suburban Cook County, the initiative focuses on making healthy options available, accessible and convenient for all residents.

For more information, please visit [www.cookcountypublichealth.org](http://www.cookcountypublichealth.org) and click on Healthy Initiatives, call 708-524-5156 or email [cppw@phimc.org](mailto:cppw@phimc.org).