Priorities for Healthy Places
2013-2014
Building vibrant communities for all Massachusetts residents

A project of the Massachusetts Public Health Association
The Act FRESH Campaign

Building healthy and vibrant communities for all Massachusetts residents

The Act FRESH Campaign, launched in 2011, is a project of the Massachusetts Public Health Association (MPHA) and is led by a diverse group of MPHA member organizations - grassroots organizations and statewide associations from every region of the Commonwealth.

Healthy people need healthy places. The places where we live, learn, work, and play can support – or discourage – healthy choices. The Act FRESH Campaign is taking action to build a better future for all Massachusetts residents by improving access to healthy, affordable food and safe public spaces for physical activity.

Every resident of Massachusetts deserves opportunities like good schools with regular physical education, accessible public transit that connects them to economic opportunities, safe places to be physically active, and affordable grocery stores.

The infrastructure in too many of our communities limits healthy options. We have seen the results: a steady rise in unhealthy weight and preventable chronic diseases here and across the nation. Diabetes, heart disease, cancers, and stroke are shortening lives, decreasing quality of life, and costing billions annually in medical expenses and lost productivity. Low-income communities and communities of color with fewer healthy resources have been affected the most.

Over the last two years, the Act FRESH Campaign has changed the conversation. We’ve built new partnerships with local leaders in every corner of the state; helped pass the Prevention and Wellness Trust Fund; built new and creative alliances with education, planning, land use, and transportation; and moved the needle on healthy policies in communities and at the State House. In the two years ahead, we will build on this success for an even wider reach and greater impact.

LEADERSHIP PRIORITIES

- Advance Health Equity through Transportation Policy
- Implement and Expand the Prevention and Wellness Trust
- Pass Zoning Reform Legislation for Healthy Community Design

ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES

- Pass Legislation to Increase Physical Activity and Physical Education in Schools
- Create a Fresh Food Financing Initiative

Together with you, we can accomplish these goals. Please join us.
Policy Priorities, 2013-2014

Advance Health Equity through Transportation Policy

We call on the Legislature to invest in better walking, biking, and public transit infrastructure and to advance health equity by supporting a long term solution to our state's transportation needs. A healthy transportation infrastructure can impact public health in many ways:

- promoting greater physical activity by supporting walking and biking, including to and from transit stops
- reducing emissions and the impact of asthma and other conditions
- reducing injuries and fatalities from traffic accidents
- connecting residents to economic opportunities and resources such as healthy food stores and health care facilities

We support raising significant new state revenue in a way that protects low and moderate income families and provides for investments in historically underserved communities, including communities of color and Gateway Cities. We call for the creation of a new Active Streets certification program to provide funds to support municipalities to invest in “complete streets” that include pedestrian, bicycle and transit improvements as part of local projects.

Implement and Expand the Prevention and Wellness Trust

The Prevention and Wellness Trust Fund, passed into law in 2012, is the first of its kind in any state in the nation and will dramatically increase funding for community prevention activities. The Trust will invest $60 million in evidence-based community prevention activities, with the goal of reducing costly health conditions. The Trust represents a groundbreaking investment; now we must deliver on the promise.

We will promote implementation that it is timely, transparent, and focused on health equity. We will work closely with grantees to build support and visibility among public officials, residents, and media. And we will seek to expand funding so that the Trust can have an even bigger impact.
Pass Zoning Reform Legislation for Healthy Community Design

Local zoning codes are the DNA of communities. However, in Massachusetts, many of these codes have not been updated in generations. Old zoning codes can promote sprawl, pollution, social isolation, and stunted economic development, while at times presenting obstacles to healthy development such as grocery stores.

We call for reform of our state’s out-of-date zoning laws in order to promote long-term health benefits. Smarter zoning codes can improve health by promoting community features like mixed commercial-residential districts that encourage walking and biking, preservation of open space that promotes active recreation, improved access to healthy food choices, and reduced exposure to pollution. These are features that help make all of our communities inclusive and prosperous.

**ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES**

**Pass Legislation to Increase Physical Activity and Physical Education In Schools**

Regular physical activity helps to control weight, improve health, and increase academic achievement. However, less than half of Massachusetts high school students meet recommendations for physical activity, and the number of students participating in regular physical education (PE) has decreased dramatically in the last 20 years. We support legislation to increase the consistency and quality of PE in all grade levels, and to require minimum time for physical activity through recess, in-class activity, and other means outside of traditional PE curriculum.

**Create a Fresh Food Financing Initiative**

Across the state, food deserts and “food swamps” – areas inundated with unhealthy food options – plague rural and urban areas, forcing some residents to travel long distances to purchase healthy foods. In areas with a high number of corner stores, these businesses often lack the capital and technical expertise to provide healthy foods. The Grocery Access Task Force – a public-private partnership of leaders from the grocery industry, economic development, public health, and civic sectors – has recommended that grants and low-cost loans be made available to retailers offering healthy options in underserved communities. We call on the Patrick Administration and the legislature to fully implement these recommendations.

To learn more about the data supporting investments in healthy places see “Why Act FRESH? Why Now?” available at www.MPHAweb.org/ActFRESH.htm.
To learn more and get involved in the Act FRESH Campaign, visit www.MPHAweb.org/actfresh.htm or contact us at:

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Health Care For All
Health Resources in Action
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Massachusetts Chapter - American Academy of Pediatrics
Massachusetts Association of Health Boards
Massachusetts Public Health Association
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Voices for a Healthy SouthCoast
Worcester Food & Active Living Policy Council

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