

# **How Communities Move Policy –**

*Linking Locally, Regionally, Statewide, and  
Nationally to Create Change*





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## I. Policy Change: Local, Regional, State, and Federal

**Policy change happens at many levels.** Changing policies and practices at a school or preschool, in a local business or workplace, or in your neighborhood or town creates local, palpable, and lasting change. It also provides models that can influence change in regional, state or federal policies. Conversely, policy change at the regional, state or federal levels can have powerful local implications. These policy changes often direct or redirect funding, set standards, or create mandates across entire regions, states or the nation. Yet, to be effective most policy changes require implementation at the local level.

This interrelationship of policies at all levels, from local to national, creates opportunities for multiple approaches to pursuing healthy community goals, and gives immense importance to the efforts of advocates working at all levels, from the most intimate and local, to the most far reaching.

**The greatest impact and progress is generally achieved** when advocates at all levels stay informed about developments at the other levels, and strategically partner and coordinate their efforts. An iconic example of such coordinated effort was the process that brought about tobacco control laws in California. Simultaneously, communities across California pushed to pass local smoke free ordinances. Eventually, local policy changes achieved enough momentum on the issue that the state passed comprehensive laws.

Within the arena of creating healthy food and physical activity environments, community coalitions around California and in other parts of the U.S. have produced a wealth of examples of

local community change that have provided the models and substance for the First Lady's Let's Move Initiative to reverse childhood obesity. Let's Move, and myriad state and federal policy changes over the course of the last several years, such as CA's school vending nutrition rules, menu labeling laws, and federal funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act: *Communities Putting Prevention to Work* have, in turn, supported, catalyzed and propelled healthy community change.

**How can communities plug in?** Examples of local change have the power to influence neighboring communities and guide and bolster regional, state and federal policy. And the right regional, state or federal policies can provide unique tools and leverage points for work at the community level. But how can people working in communities stay informed about what is happening in other communities and at other levels? How can they determine ripe opportunities to get involved? How can they use their experience to shape policy directions? And how can they make the most of change happening elsewhere in order to accomplish their local goals? *How can communities, in practical and doable ways, be an ongoing part of a broader movement for change that both builds upon and helps accomplish their local work?*

**A wealth of experience in California is linked via networks.** California benefits from many groups – local, regional, and statewide – that have been working for years to build health equity and improve food and physical activity environments within California communities. As a result, not only is there a wealth of experience, expertise, and creativity at all levels, but there are networks in place through which community groups can link to other communities, state advocates link to one another, and advocates can link across their levels of focus.

## II. The California Convergence Network

**California Convergence** is a statewide network of community collaboratives and local advocates, working with state advocates and other partners, to build health equity in communities by improving food and physical activity environments. Organized into emerging regions throughout the state, California Convergence connects communities with others doing similar work for peer to peer learning, and to unite community voices to for coordinated statewide policy action.

### California Convergence Goals:

- Increase access to healthy foods and physical activity in all environments where people live, work, learn and play.
- Raise the visibility and voice of local leaders, and stories of local successes, to influence state and federal policy change.
- Increase democratic involvement by community residents so that residents have leadership and decision making authority in shaping the community environments in which they live.
- Advocate for shared health-focused policies and practices in communities, schools and other systems and environments.
- Share lessons learned, promote best practices, and optimize resources and community strengths.
- Build health equity in communities by improving food and physical activity environments.
- Build collaborative relationships with public, private and non-profit partners from diverse fields (e.g. transportation, agriculture, land use, education, housing) that support the mission of California Convergence.

**Convergence membership** is open to all California residents, organizations, coalitions and collaboratives that share similar goals. Its founding members, convened in 2007, included communities from seven initiatives in California that were working to improve food and physical activity environments. These initiatives had in common a focus on place-based policy and systems change. While several of these initiatives have now sunset, many of the coalitions, organizations and individuals involved continue advocating for change, and remain members of Convergence. New members with similar goals have also joined.

### Emerging Convergence Regions



### What Convergence offers local community collaboratives:

Convergence includes one well-established region (Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program/CCROPP) and other emerging regions. These regional groups allow for the flow of information between local community collaboratives and state policy advocates. This two-way communication both informs and contributes to policy wins at the local and state level. The regional groups:

- Provide opportunities for local individuals, organizations and coalitions to connect and share information about strategies for improving food and physical activity environments in communities.
- Identify and recommend statewide policy action relevant to the needs of local communities in that region.
- Identify and request the resources, training and tools needed to put state policies into practice at the local level.
- Identify and act upon regional policy priorities.
- Enable local residents to engage in statewide policy advocacy efforts.

### What local communities can bring to Convergence:

Convergence builds on what works on the ground, and strives to achieve large-scale change that ultimately builds healthy communities and a healthy California. Local community leaders and organizations play a crucial role, if California is to accomplish such transformational change. Thus, to be active members of this growing network, local groups commit to:

- Pass local policies and change the practices of local organizations, to support access to healthy food and physical activity, and to improve the physical environment of neighborhoods.
- Provide input on potential statewide policy; advocate for statewide policies, such as by writing letters or speaking to legislators; and work to implement statewide policies locally.
- Share local experience, expertise and information with peers across the region and throughout the Convergence network.

California Convergence is guided by a community-driven Steering Committee consisting of local leaders representing the

regions from across the state. Partnership for the Public's Health, a center of the Public Health Institute, provides day to day staffing and support for Convergence.

### How to connect to California Convergence

To learn more about the California Convergence, visit the website at [www.CaliforniaConvergence.org](http://www.CaliforniaConvergence.org). Anyone can join the interactive website to stay informed of Convergence activities, events and policy or funding opportunities of interest to people doing similar work.

To access the Convergence member directory, announcements of funding opportunities, or to post your own information, simply join and log into the website as a member. You may also wish to sign up to receive the Convergence newsletter.

Community leaders and their organizations or collaboratives can go deeper by joining others in their region, and by being represented on the Convergence interactive map. For more information, contact Lisa Hershey at 510-409-2406 or [lhershey@PartnershipPH.org](mailto:lhershey@PartnershipPH.org).



Photo by Tim Wagner for HEAC



Photo by Tim Wagner for HEAC

### III. Strategic Alliance

**Since its founding in 2001, Strategic Alliance** has striven to maintain a steady drumbeat for environmental, organizational and policy changes in California to improve health, equity, nutrition and physical activity. Though Strategic Alliance members are independent in their visions and action, Strategic Alliance provides a place to unite their range of strategies into one cohesive platform. A core shared goal among Strategic Alliance members is to shift the debate on eating and physical activity away from a primary focus on individual behavior and personal choice to one that examines corporate and government practices and the role of the environment in shaping eating and activity behaviors.

#### Strategic Alliance creates a meta-platform that serves to:

- 1) Create unity out of diverse interests.
- 2) Convey the range of solutions needed to create equitable health outcomes.

3) Provide many approaches to tackling chronic disease prevention for allies, advocates and the media.

4) Lay the groundwork and foster a political climate for issues that may at first seem out of the mainstream, such as breastfeeding or organic food once were.

5) Create a focal point for government or 'non-health' constituencies who are drawn to this approach.

The Strategic Alliance Steering Committee includes 14 member organizations, and Prevention Institute provides staffing for the Alliance. The Steering Committee includes organizations that: advocate for state policy change; provide technical assistance to advocates; anchor local advocacy but have statewide influence; and provide evaluation to interventions aimed at improving food and physical activity environments.

Through Strategic Alliance, these organizations come together for dialogue, discussion, and to develop strategies. While Strategic Alliance does not itself track or move policy, it provides a forum for those groups who do to coordinate their efforts.

Together, Strategic Alliance members think about what is needed to get California state legislators and state administration to pass or implement policy that supports healthier food and physical activity environments.

### Strategic Alliance supports the work of community advocates through:

#### Action Alerts

Strategic Alliance, on an ongoing basis keeps a pulse on what's going on at the state level. Via its email list and Action Alerts it notifies members about opportunities for policy action, such as signing on to legislative support letters, testifying at legislative hearings or providing public comment on proposed rules and regulations.

#### Rapid Response Media Network

The Rapid Response Network helps advocates use the media to promote healthy food and physical activity environments. A partnership between Berkeley Media Studies Group and Strategic Alliance, the Network provides the news analysis that helps advocates use media advocacy linked to the events of the day, to support local and statewide nutrition and physical activity policy efforts. Strategic Alliance provides talking points to guide responses to major news stories and industry actions, and can provide individual support for crafting op-eds and letters to the editor, and talking points to highlight the importance of your work.

#### Strategic Alliance Steering Committee

- California Adolescent Nutrition and Fitness Program (CANFit)
- California Center for Public Health Advocacy
- California Food Policy Advocates
- California Pan-Ethnic Health Network
- California Park & Recreation Society
- California Project LEAN
- California WIC Association
- Child Care Food Program Roundtable
- Latino Health Access
- Partnership for the Public's Health
- Prevention Institute
- Samuels & Associates
- PolicyLink
- Public Health Law and Policy

All of these organizations welcome direct communication with local leaders, and some offer regular workshops, webinars and other events to link locally. These organizations also partner with community leaders via the California Convergence, which receives policy support from the Strategic Alliance. Convergence serves as a portal to help streamline and make information and policy action opportunities more accessible, to help community leaders stay informed and involved.

#### Environmental Nutrition and Activity Community Tool (ENACT)

ENACT offers a concrete, interactive menu of strategies designed to help communities enhance food and physical activity environments on a local level. It provides communities with "how-to" resources to prioritize and implement strategies for change in key local environments (schools, worksites, etc.). A key component is the ENACT Local Policy Database, an online resource cataloging proven and promising local policies for encouraging healthy eating and physical activity within diverse communities and localities nationwide.

#### ENACT Day

Every spring Strategic Alliance steering committee members and other partners organize a day of legislative visits in Sacramento focusing on legislation to improve food and physical activity environments. The day has two parts: a morning of training and talking points on the specific legislation that has been selected as the year's focus; and an afternoon of small groups made up of community leaders and advocates going together to visit legislators, and advocate for these policies. ENACT Day also serves as a networking opportunity for advocates at the local, regional and state levels. Local leaders or advocates who are interested in serving on the planning committee are encouraged to contact: Juliet Sims, Juliet@preventioninstitute.org

For more information on Strategic Alliance, visit  
<http://preventioninstitute.org/strategic-alliance>.



## IV. Other Key Networks in CA

While California Convergence links many communities, organizations and individuals throughout the state, and Strategic Alliance, a key partner to Convergence, links state policy advocates working on similar issues, California also has a number of other active networks working to improve food and physical activity environments. Some of these include:

### **Building Health Communities**

Launched by The California Endowment in 2010, the 14 Building Healthy Communities (BHC) sites will be working over the course of the coming decade to improve health equity through place-based change, including (though not limited to) improving food and physical activity environments. BHC has its own initiative-specific network. Many coalition member organizations at the BHC sites are also members of or participants in other networks and statewide activities.

Closed network: Only BHC sites may be members.

[www.calendow.org/healthycommunities](http://www.calendow.org/healthycommunities)

### **Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program (CCROPP)**

The Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program (CCROPP) was developed to work with communities throughout the San Joaquin Valley on creating healthier and safer places for people to live, learn, work and play. CCROPP has formed community councils in each county, bringing together community members, schools, local government, health care providers and others to fight the obesity epidemic. By working regionally in the San Joaquin Valley CCROPP has established a presence that has served to draw attention to the unique challenges for communities in Central California. The CCROPP region participates in the California Convergence, and its regional network has become a model for other, emerging regional efforts.

Open network: New groups may join their county council.

[www.csufresno.edu/ccchhs/institutes\\_programs/CCROPP](http://www.csufresno.edu/ccchhs/institutes_programs/CCROPP)

### **ClimatePlan**

With the passage of California's groundbreaking climate change legislation, health and equity advocates recognized an opportunity to achieve multiple goals in one process. Assembly Bill 32 requires California to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions substantially; and Senate Bill 375 establishes how some of that will be accomplished, through better land use and transportation planning. To help assure that California would really implement these extraordinary policies and achieve the best overarching outcomes, the ClimatePlan coalition formed. ClimatePlan brings



together land use, transportation, health, equity, affordable housing, environmental, clean air and other advocates. This coalition is leading efforts in several regions throughout the state to assure both that greenhouse targets are met, and that this is done in ways that optimize health, economic, social and environmental outcomes for all.

Open coalition: New organizations may join.

[www.ClimatePlanCA.org](http://www.ClimatePlanCA.org)

### **Healthy Places Coalition**

The Healthy Places Coalition fosters public health involvement in land use and transportation planning to ensure that all neighborhoods in California promote the opportunity to live a healthy life. It does this by supporting collaboration, developing and advancing local and state policy, working with developers, and providing tools and resources. The coalition consists of practitioners from planning, public health, parks and recreation, and other relevant fields, as well as community advocates, academics, and concerned individuals from around the state committed to social and health equity.

Open coalition.

[www.preventioninstitute.org/initiatives.html](http://www.preventioninstitute.org/initiatives.html)

### Kaiser Permanente's Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Initiative

Kaiser Permanente's HEAL Initiative was one of the founding members of California Convergence. While many of the other founding initiatives have now sunset, Kaiser Permanente is in the process of expanding and extending HEAL funding to support several new sites in California, and to continue its support in existing sites. Many HEAL member communities are part of California Convergence; and HEAL has its own initiative-specific network that connects HEAL sites in multiple states.

Closed network: Only KP HEAL sites may be members.  
[http://info.kp.org/communitybenefit/html/our\\_work/global/our\\_work\\_3\\_a.html](http://info.kp.org/communitybenefit/html/our_work/global/our_work_3_a.html)

### League of Cities HEAL Initiative

The League of Cities, a network of city governments throughout California, recently established its own Healthy Eating Active Living Initiative. The League of Cities HEAL Initiative invites cities to join the Healthy Eating Active Living Cities Campaign by adopting one or more policies to increase physical activity and access to healthy food for their employees and residents. Registered HEAL cities receive training and technical assistance, recognition, a tailored press release and other benefits. To date, 76 cities in California have joined the HEAL campaign.

Open network: New cities may join.  
[www.healcitiescampaign.org](http://healcitiescampaign.org)

### Network for a Healthy California

Federally funded through the food stamp program, and under state administration, members of the statewide Network for a Healthy California often partner with other organizations to work toward healthier food and physical activity environments. Federal guidelines define the sorts of activities this funding can support, currently limiting policy advocacy. The Network is nevertheless a core, and, because publicly funded by a long-standing federal program, stable and long-term participant in this movement to improve nutrition opportunities within California.

Closed network: Only Network funded grantees may be members.  
[www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/CPNS/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/CPNS/Pages/default.aspx)

All of these networks or coalitions offer good partnership opportunities. Because quite a range of strategies may be involved in improving food and physical activity environments, you may also wish to partner with groups such as:

- Bicycle coalitions
- Pedestrian advocates
- Transit advocacy groups
- Smart Growth advocates
- Food justice advocates
- Environmental justice groups
- Food systems advocates
- Farmland preservationists
- Park advocates



Photo by Tim Wagner for HEAC

## V. Conclusion

California has evolved a rich array of local, regional, state and federal advocates working on all aspects of improving food and physical activity environments so that people in California communities and throughout the US can be healthier. Some of the most powerful advances in the field have come when local community groups meet, peer to peer, and learn from one another, or find shared concerns that they then bring to the table to shape state policy. At the same time, local groups in California benefit tremendously from the opportunity to partner with and be supported by experienced state advocates, knowledgeable technical assistance providers, and networks that make it easier to collaborate, conjoin efforts, and take the local work to scale statewide. By linking to others through a network, communities stay abreast of the broader movement, and join others to create a California and a nation where all people can live safe, healthy and productive lives.



Photo by Tim Wagner for HEAC

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