

# What do neighborhoods have to do with health?

If you ask people about health, most will think about doctors and hospitals. But most of the time, doctors and hospitals are what we use when we are sick – that is, when we don't have health.

The leading causes of death today are chronic diseases - like cancer, heart disease, diabetes, hypertension and stroke – and injuries from car crashes and guns. These health problems, along with arthritis, asthma, and mental illness, are also our leading medical causes of disability. Medical care can help manage these health problems, but it rarely cures or prevents them. But many of these diseases and injuries can be prevented by changing our behaviors.

Public health researchers at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have made estimates of the behaviors and exposures that underlie the diseases and injuries that kill us. By their estimates, nearly half of all deaths are caused by just a few behaviors, particularly smoking, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, alcohol consumption, car crashes, and use of guns.

Our neighborhoods can make it easier or harder to practice healthy behaviors. For example, it is easier to get exercise if you live next to a park than if you live on a major thoroughfare, and it is easier to eat healthy foods if stores nearby sell them.

Today in New Orleans we aren't just rebuilding levees and houses, we are rebuilding neighborhoods. We have never before had this kind of opportunity to reshape the places in which we live, and we probably never will again. We can try to rebuild them exactly as they were before, or we can rebuild them better. If we want to be healthier, we can rebuild our neighborhoods with a few simple features that make it easier for all of us to behave in a healthy way.

The picture on the other side of this page shows how we can build health into our neighborhoods, by including:

- Parks and playgrounds
- Bike lanes, sidewalks, and safer streets
- Neighborhood schools and health clinics
- Stores that sell healthy food instead of cigarettes, alcohol, and junk food
- Lighting and visibility to deter crime
- Public transit

Here is just one example of what positive changes can do:



For more information about healthy neighborhood design, check out the resources listed below:

## Resources for Rebuilding Healthy Neighborhoods

[www.walkinginfo.org](http://www.walkinginfo.org) and [www.bicyclinginfo.org](http://www.bicyclinginfo.org)

Info on improving the walking and bicycling environments; how to identify problems and find solutions

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

Resources for creating and funding trails and greenways

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

Info on federal funding program for pedestrian and bicycle facilities, landscaping, historic preservation, pedestrian and bicycle safety, etc.

[www.cityofno.com](http://www.cityofno.com)

("Residents," "City Planning Commission")

City Planning Commission's Master Plan for parks, land use, and transportation (recommendations for pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure in all Districts)

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

Info on changing the environment to support physical activity; community toolbox available

[www.activelivingbydesign.org](http://www.activelivingbydesign.org)  
("Healthy Eating by Design")

Info on assessing the local food network, promoting healthy eating in schools, neighborhoods, and workplaces

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

Info on preventing problems related to alcohol availability through environmental approaches

[www.crimereduction.gov.uk/activecommunities61.htm](http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/activecommunities61.htm)

Environmental design techniques for preventing crime; "Safer Places: Planning System and Crime Prevention"

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

Resources for promoting smoke-free environments



## Rebuilding a Healthier New Orleans



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*The Prevention Research Center at Tulane University is a member of the Prevention Research Centers Program, supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, under cooperative agreement #1-U48-DP-001948.*

# What Makes a Neighborhood Healthy?



Graphic Illustration  
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**1) Parks and playgrounds** are places where children and adults can exercise and where neighbors can talk to each other and solve common problems.

**2) Bicycle lanes** provide a safe way for people to travel that gives them the benefit of exercise and does not cause air pollution.

**3) Neighborhood schools** allow kids to walk or bike to school, increasing their physical activity and reducing car traffic. The whole neighborhood benefits when school buildings and grounds are used for community activities and events after school hours.

**4) Safer street designs** encourage walking and prevent injuries. Wide sidewalks keep pedestrians away from car traffic. In commercial areas, large rounded curb extensions slow car traffic and provide safer parking lanes. Well-marked crosswalks let drivers know that pedestrians have the right-of-way at intersections.

**5) Neighborhood health clinics** make it easier for children to receive immunizations and for adults to be tested for common diseases like high blood pressure and diabetes.

**6) Healthier corner stores** help people have healthier habits by selling fruits and vegetables (which prevent cancer, stroke, and heart disease) instead of chips, soda, cigarettes, and liquor. When small stores are near houses, people can get exercise by walking to shop.

**7) Lighting and “neighborhood visibility”** discourage crime and violence. Crime happens where people are not watching. Crime can be prevented with street lighting, especially at bus and streetcar stops, and building features like porches and street-level windows that make it easier for residents to watch outdoor areas.

**8) No liquor stores.** Stores that sell alcohol tend to encourage loitering, littering, crime, and violence, and make people afraid to walk outdoors.

**9) Public transportation** gets people out of cars, which increases their physical activity, and reduces air pollution from cars, which helps to reduce asthma. When more people are on the street, it also helps prevent crime.

