

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMUNITY HEALTHY LIVING INDEX

WHAT IS THE COMMUNITY HEALTHY LIVING INDEX?

Healthy lifestyles are difficult to maintain without supportive environments. The Community Healthy Living Index is a set of tools available for communities to assess the extent that policies, systems, and environments (PSE) support healthy living in the places where people live, work, learn, and play.

These tools are comprised of assessments and accompanying discussion and improvement planning guides in these six settings:

- Afterschool Child Care
- Early Childhood Program
- Neighborhood
- School
- Work Site
- Community-at-Large

Communities use these tools to discover strengths, identify needs, plan for action, and—ultimately, build healthier communities.

WHY IS THE COMMUNITY HEALTHY LIVING INDEX NEEDED?

Creating opportunities for healthy living makes a community stronger. Surprisingly, a major contributor to the health crisis in the United States is within our control. Physical inactivity and unhealthy eating contribute to obesity and a number of chronic diseases, including some cancers, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes.

CHLI addresses contributing factors to this lack of physical activity and poor nutrition. Its premise is that healthy eating and physical activity have been systematically engineered out of our lives, through societal and cultural developments, such as

- unplanned urban sprawl;
- increased sedentary leisure pursuits such as television viewing and computer use;
- concerns about safety and crime;
- increased use of motor vehicles in place of walking and biking;
- decreased physical education, activity, and recess in schools;
- communities developed without sidewalks or pathways for pedestrians;
- a loss of financial support and commitment to public venues for play and recreation;
- larger food and beverage portion sizes;

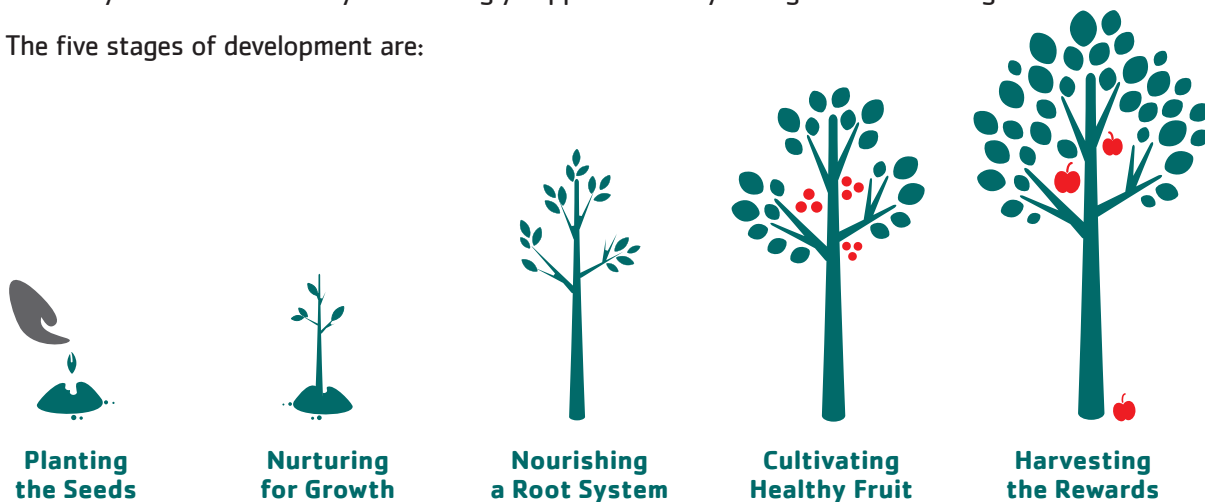
- increased access to quick food with minimal nutritional value;
- lack of incentives or funding for farmers markets, community gardens, or food pricing strategies that encourage the purchase of nutritional foods.

The CHLI assessments will help your community identify opportunities for change that will help individuals and families eat healthier and move more. Policy approaches may be especially important as they can benefit all people exposed to the environment rather than focusing on changing behaviors one person at a time.

HOW ARE WE MEASURING PROGRESS?

The CHLI assessment process is not a matter of winning or losing, nor is it a measure of success or failure. Completing an assessment does not produce a numeric score; rather, it provides an environment’s stage of development within the continuum of progress toward providing residents opportunities for healthy living. Throughout this guide, this change process is described through the metaphor of planting an apple orchard. Just as a farmer starts small by planting seeds and then provides appropriate care for each stage of the trees’ development until the harvest, community leaders, stakeholders, and residents can nourish their environments through the process of change until they create a community that strongly supports healthy eating and active living.

The five stages of development are:



Stages of development are determined by the overall balance between opportunities for improvement and supports for healthy eating and active living that already exist in the environment. For example, if the assessment of one site reflects very minimal supports for healthy eating and active living, the site is in the Planting the Seeds stage of development.

WHAT COULD POSITIVE CHANGE IN COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTS LOOK LIKE?

To some degree, positive change will look as different from one place to another as the communities themselves. Strategies to affect positive change and the resulting changes themselves will vary depending on where a community finds itself along the stage of development continuum. Strategies may include providing access to facilities and programs not currently available and supporting social environments that favor physical activity and healthy eating. The assessment statements included in CHLI offer communities a range of policy strategies to consider implementing in their own community.

STRATEGIES TO INCREASE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO

- building and maintaining walking and bicycle paths;
- increasing funding for public facilities and parks;
- zoning and land-use regulations that facilitate activity in neighborhoods (e.g., mixed-use development, sidewalks required with all new buildings, green space);
- providing outdoor play spaces for children to interact with nature walk-to-school programs;
- restoring physical education and activity to schools;
- building design that encourages physical activity (e.g., attractive open stairwells, bike storage, bathrooms with showers, sidewalks and paths around the building).

STRATEGIES TO INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES FOR AND ACCESS TO NUTRITIOUS FOOD INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO

- price incentives for healthy foods and beverages in neighborhood stores and supermarkets, work sites, and schools (e.g., lower prices for vegetables and fruits as compared to candy);
- moderate portions at restaurants;
- Farmers' markets acceptance of Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits;
- availability of a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables in stores in the community and/or from alternative sources such as farmers markets, roadside fruit and vegetable stands, or community gardens;
- menu labeling;
- healthy food choices in early childhood programs, school meals, school food services, and work sites.

HOW WILL OUR COMMUNITY BENEFIT FROM CHLI?

Though every community's success will be different, communities around the country have used the tools with great success since the tool's launch in 2008. Here are some examples:

- Chad Jansen, Executive Director, Roy Blunt YMCA of Bolivar, MO:

The Community Healthy Living Index could not have been introduced at a better time for our community. CHLI helped us bring together new and existing partners to provide an instrumental contribution to our community's most recent City Comprehensive Plan. With the energy and deliberate work of this well-rounded professional team, we were able to build outlined improvement plans from the CHLI assessments into the Master Plan. Key concepts and target areas from CHLI are woven through the Master Plan. It is exciting to know that the vision and focus of our community is aligned with the development plan of the Community Healthy Living Index.

- Nivada Spurlock, NBCT, Wellness Coordinator, Homewood City Schools, Birmingham, AL:

CHLI provided our school system with valuable information about healthy school environments that we have used to change physical education policies for students in kindergarten through eighth

grade. We used the CHLI process to carefully assess our child nutrition program, health/physical education program, and general school environment. One of the best aspects of CHLI is that the results cannot be interpreted as “negative publicity”. As an educator it is important to be honest about our institution’s weaknesses while continuing to gain community support. CHLI allowed our school, businesses in our area and even neighborhoods to be involved in the process of affecting positive change by completing the Index. The process itself only requires a limited amount of time but provides amazing results through self-assessment.

- Teresa McIntire, Wellness Director, Channel Islands YMCA and Judy Taggart, MS CHES, Director, Community Health Lompoc Valley Community Healthcare Organization, Lompoc, CA:

Our assessments were extremely educational for our coalition and our community. Obtaining local data provided us with the ability to effectively target our resources. Our community learned which concerns should be prioritized. We also used our assessment data to enlist the support of an organization in the community that had not previously perceived community health as having a direct impact on their work.

WHAT WILL OUR TEAM GET FROM USING CHLI?

The CHLI assessment process is a rich experience with many benefits (some mentioned above) that will give you a snapshot of how well sites in your community are supporting healthy eating and active living. Since CHLI does not use a scientific sampling frame it is not considered a representative sample, but merely a snapshot of sites within your community. If needed, a more complex sampling frame could be used to choose CHLI sites.

Each site assessed and submitted online will immediately generate two tangible outputs, a printable survey with the site’s answers and the site’s stage of development along the apple orchard continuum. Both of these items will be useful in completing the Discussion and Improvement Planning Guide (DIPG) that follows the assessment phase. The discussion that occurs during the DIPG process involves multiple site stakeholders who provide context for what site improvements are possible. CHLI Core Elements, which are available for each sector, provide examples of the components that make a site supportive for healthy living. The discussion that occurs with the site stakeholders when using all of the tools available; the DIPG, Core Elements, the site’s assessment and stage of development, provides enough direction to set an appropriate course of action for change.

WHAT RESOURCES ARE NEEDED TO COMPLETE CHLI?

Time. CHLI requires time to plan, schedule and facilitate assessments as well as the DIPG.

Long-term investment. Implementing an improvement plan will likely result in increased human and financial investments that will need to be forecast and planned for by the larger community and/or the afterschool sites, early childhood programs, schools, work sites, and neighborhoods themselves.

For example:

- The community may determine that improved sidewalks, trails, bike paths, playgrounds, farmers markets, or community gardens are needed.
- Afterschool sites may begin to ensure that their snack or meal times introduce a variety of appealing healthy food and beverage options to children and may help children get the 60 minutes of recommended daily physical activity by providing 30 minutes of activity for half-day programs and 60 minutes for all-day, holiday, or vacation programs.
- Early childhood programs may realize that space improvements are needed for indoor play.
- Schools may launch a Safe Routes to School initiative to increase children’s opportunities to actively travel to school; or, schools may start to purchase from local farms to increase the amount of local produce served in the school cafeteria.
- Work sites may decide to make stairwells more accessible and attractive to employees or to provide healthy food options at meetings or events.

WHAT SUPPORT WILL WE RECEIVE TO COMPLETE THE CHLI PROCESS?

Updated training opportunities can be found at www.ymca.net/communityhealthylivingindex. Please contact chli@ymca.net for e-mail support.

WHY IS YMCA OF THE USA INVOLVED?

Strengthening community is our cause and we think that creating opportunities for healthy living makes a community stronger. Throughout our history we have responded to the nation’s most pressing social needs. YMCA of the USA (Y-USA) created CHLI in response to our nation’s health crisis. CHLI helps communities transform themselves into ones that provide the best opportunities for individuals and families to eat right, be active, and live healthier. Our hope is that this resource helps advance the larger healthy communities movement across the nation.

HOW WAS THE COMMUNITY HEALTHY LIVING INDEX CREATED?

These assessment tools were developed in partnership with experts from Stanford, Harvard, and St. Louis universities; the pilot tools were tested using scientific methods to ensure reliability and validity. An expert advisory task force, listed in the appendix, also reviewed the tools.