



Metro Vision 2040
A program of DRCOG

COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELLNESS Issues Paper



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DRCOG
DENVER REGIONAL COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
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Introduction and Overview

Background

The Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG), the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and Regional Planning Commission for the Denver metropolitan area, has statutory authority to prepare the area's long-range plan for transportation, growth, development, and environmental quality. DRCOG has 56 member jurisdictions and works to build consensus and find common solutions among them. In addition to facilitating dialogue among these local governments, DRCOG manages various regional programs that focus on advocacy, aging services, environment, regional growth and development, shared services, and transportation.

A process to update its regional plan, Metro Vision 2035, was initiated by DRCOG in 2013. The updated plan, Metro Vision 2040, will refine the previous vision and goals. It will also address emerging regional trends and topics, such as community health and wellness, which is the focus of this issues paper. Many local jurisdictions and partner organizations are already working tirelessly to improve community health and wellness, and DRCOG recognizes that this topic is of growing interest and concern for the region. This paper introduces some of the key challenges related to community health and wellness in the Denver region, and identifies some potential solutions for DRCOG and local governments to consider during the Metro Vision 2040 update process and beyond.

Defining Key Terms

Throughout this report, the terms "health" and "wellness" are used together, sometimes interchangeably. Definitions of these and other related key terms used throughout this document are provided below to improve context and clarity of the discussion.

Health

Health is the state of physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.¹ The term can be used to describe the state of individuals or populations, and can also be used to describe the state of communities and other geographical areas.

Wellness

Wellness is a process through which people become aware of, and make choices toward, a more successful existence. Wellness is multifaceted and interconnected, featuring a collection of dimensions including but not limited to physical, spiritual, emotional, and social.²

¹ Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19-22 June, 1946; signed on 22 July 1946 by the representatives of 61 States (Official Records of the World Health Organization, no. 2, p. 100) and entered into force on 7 April 1948.

Active Living

A way of life that integrates physical activity, such as walking or bicycling and other activities, into daily decisions and routines.

Food System

An interconnected network that includes the production, processing, distribution, and consumption of food. The term “local food system” (or “regional food system”) is used to describe a method of food production and distribution that is geographically localized, rather than national and/or international. Food is grown (or raised) and harvested close to consumers' homes, then distributed over much shorter distances than is common in the conventional global industrial food system.³ In general, food systems capable of providing for the basic nutritional needs of a defined populace must be organized at a regional or sub-regional scale to incorporate the necessary land supply for production.

Importance of Community Health and Wellness in the Region

Rising care costs, aging populations, accessibility of services, and socio-economic disparities are just a few of the many health- and wellness-related trends and issues of concern in the Denver area. In response to these and other issues, community health and wellness is increasingly becoming part of discussions and planning at the local level, both in the Denver region and across the nation. The profession of planning, with its emphasis on protecting residents from potentially harmful living conditions, has roots in public health needs, yet in recent decades, the topic of health and wellness has shifted away from the responsibility and focus of planners, to health departments and professionals. In recent years, however, this focus has shifted again, and planners and health professionals alike are recognizing health and wellness as topics that are broad and diverse, with evident social implications, as well as economic and environmental ones.

Local governments are in a unique position to help shape the physical and natural environment, economy, and the health-related choices available through their leadership, decision-making, and community investments. It is necessary to understand how important community health and wellness is not only to the quality of life in local communities, but also to the entire Denver region. Regional focus on community health and wellness is important for the following reasons:

- **Health is a growth and development issue.** The location, types, and patterns of development all shape individual decisions and behaviors, and influence local and regional health outcomes. Careful planning can ensure that growth and development occurs in ways that positively influence and support good health, not in ways that make it difficult for people to make healthy

² The Six Dimensions of Wellness. The National Wellness Institute, 2014.
http://www.nationalwellness.org/?page=Six_Dimensions. Accessed February 27, 2014.

³ Local and Regional Food Systems. Grace Communications Foundation. <http://www.sustainabletable.org/254/local-regional-food-systems>. Accessed April 3, 2014.

choices or that put populations at greater risk for unhealthy behaviors or other negative health outcomes.

- **Health is a transportation issue.** The transportation system, including options for transportation and overall mobility, as well as lack of choice or options, can have a profound influence on public health.⁴ Populations who have opportunities to walk and bike to destinations on a frequent basis are more likely to maintain healthy weights and benefit from regular physical fitness. Populations who spend long periods commuting by car often experience higher levels of stress, and are more susceptible to other health risk factors such as long periods of sedentary behavior and unhealthier weights. Transportation modes and commuting patterns also directly affect regional air quality which can lead to health issues such as asthma, lung cancer, and heart disease.⁵
- **Health is an environmental issue.** In addition to air quality, other environmental factors such as water quality, soil quality, and access to nature and open space also affect regional and community health and wellness. The conservation and stewardship of these and other resources are critical in maintaining the health of people, as well as the other natural systems that support life.
- **Health is an economic issue.** Health care is a booming industry across the Denver region, and the Metro Denver Economic Development Corporation (EDC) predicts that it will be one of the leading sectors of economic growth in the future. For example, Colorado spends an estimated \$874 million annually treating obesity-related diseases—this condition alone is a major factor in the economy in the DRCOG region and throughout the state, and there are many other conditions and health-related issues that also present significant economic costs and revenue generation.⁶

Beyond being an area for future economic growth, health also impacts the bottom line for regional business, in terms of costs of care and ability to attract and retain employees. Residents and businesses alike are attracted to the Denver region's reputation as a healthy place to live, and maintaining this "brand" is essential in capturing future economic opportunities. Moreover, health, or lack thereof, presents very real economic realities to households. Individuals experiencing poor health may struggle with affordability or access to care, which can also impact employment options and available resources for housing, transportation, education, and nutrition.

⁴ Raynault, R., & Christopher, E. (2013). How Does Transportation Affect Public Health? *U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration, Public Roads*, 76(6). <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/publicroads/13mayjun/05.cfm>. Accessed March 4, 2014.

⁵ Alternative Transportation and Your Health. <http://www.fta.dot.gov/14504.htm>.

⁶ The Weight of the State: 2009 Report on Overweight and Obesity in Colorado. Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. www.chd.dphe.state.co.us/Resources/cms/pp/COPAN/ObesityReport.pdf. Accessed April 1, 2014.

About Metro Vision

DRCOG and its member jurisdictions have worked diligently to prepare and maintain a shared vision for the future of the metro area. That vision, known commonly as Metro Vision, serves as the foundation for ongoing dialogue about how best to enhance the quality of life that makes the Denver region such an attractive place to live, work, and play.

DRCOG maintains a long-range plan that identifies key principles, strategies, and desired outcomes to provide a road map for local governments and citizens to work collaboratively on building a better future. The current plan, Metro Vision 2035, is broken down into three main categories:

- **Growth and Development.** This section outlines policies for directing future growth by addressing urban centers, rural town centers, freestanding communities, large-lot development, and the role of community design in development patterns.
- **Transportation.** This section identifies the key corridors and systems central to the Denver region's future. The goals and policies are targeted to help the metro area provide a balanced and sustainable multimodal transportation system to ensure that all of its users have reliable mobility choices.
- **Environment.** This final section addresses the elements of the natural environment (parks and open space, water quality and conservation, air quality, noise, natural hazards, agriculture, and recreation). The policies in this section seek to protect the natural environment for people, plants and animals, and natural resources.

Metro Vision 2035 is currently undergoing a comprehensive update to address changing demographic trends and market conditions, and to enhance several sections where current and projected conditions warrant revisiting the underlying principles and strategies for success. The updated plan, Metro Vision 2040, is expected to be completed in 2014.

One emerging area of focus, identified through conversations with the Metro Vision Planning Advisory Committee (MVPAC), focus groups, participants in the Metro Vision 2040 Listening Tour and Metro Vision Idea Exchange participants, local government representatives, and other stakeholders is the topic of community health and wellness. This topic is gaining interest and momentum at the local level, and many see potential for Metro Vision 2040 to reinforce the role DRCOG and Metro Vision 2040 in supporting and establishing a vision for community health and wellness across the region. One of the key principles of Metro Vision 2035 is protecting and enhancing the region's quality of life, and many have noted the important relationship between health and wellness and overall quality of life. Beyond this principle, Metro Vision 2035 only minimally addresses the topic of community health and wellness; therefore, in order to integrate it into Metro Vision 2040, existing policies would need to be reviewed and refined, and new policies to address emerging trends and key issues would need to be considered.

The Metro Vision 2035 Plan discusses the challenges of an aging population and identifies public health risks associated with auto-centric lifestyles and development patterns, yet the plan is largely silent on direct challenges or opportunities related to community health and wellness. Metro Vision 2035 includes several policies that indirectly benefit the region's overall health and wellness, like the Urban Centers policies that stress multimodal connectivity and transportation options, to make active transportation modes such as walking and bicycling as competitive as driving within urban centers.



However, those linkages are not distinctly called out. Another example is in the Extent of Urban Development section, where one of the policies promotes compact development. The main benefit stated is an increased housing diversity. This policy could be amended to incorporate other benefits of compact development patterns, such as improved walkability, to improve the overall linkage to community health and wellness in Metro Vision 2040.

Outreach Methodology

As part of the planning process, DRCOG and Clarion Associates facilitated several stakeholder and community outreach efforts to discuss the key opportunities and challenges facing community health and wellness, DRCOG's potential role in addressing health and wellness, and successful regional efforts addressing community health and wellness. The following outreach efforts were employed to gather feedback to inform this report:

- **Focus Groups.** Dozens of stakeholders participated in roundtable discussions focused on the topic of community health and wellness with members of DRCOG staff and the consulting team. Participants included local governments, health care providers, non-profits and advocacy groups, public health officials, and other public and private entities.
- **Idea Exchange.** DRCOG hosted a Metro Vision Idea Exchange on February 11, 2014 entitled *Prescription for a Healthy Community*. This session provided participants with presentations from a public policy specialist, a local government sustainability coordinator, a private consultant, and a developer followed by an open forum to discuss community health and wellness as it relates to the Denver Metro region.
- **Metro Vision 2040 Local Government Survey.** DRCOG distributed a survey to its member jurisdictions to gather valuable feedback related to local policy strategies, challenges, and opportunities related to different topics including community health and wellness. Some of the top emerging issues that communities identified as needing further attention are related to community health and wellness, including: aging population; locally grown food and urban agriculture; and access to healthy foods.

- **Online Feedback.** DRCOG staff opened an online MindMixer forum (Our Shared Vision) to discuss health and wellness as it relates to the region. This allowed participants to respond to a series of targeted questions, have an open dialogue related to the subject, and to interact with DRCOG staff remotely.
- **2012 Listening Sessions.** In advance of the launch of the Metro Vision 2040 planning process, DRCOG conducted a regional listening tour to identify key issues to be addressed in the plan. Community health and wellness was discussed as an important consideration for Metro Vision 2040, particularly the need to engage the healthcare community in the process and to consider access to healthy foods.
- **Advisory Committees.** The Citizens Advisory Committee and the Metro Vision Planning Advisory Committee (MVPAC) convened on several occasions to provide feedback on the potential roles of DRCOG and Metro Vision 2040 in addressing the topic of health and wellness.

These efforts helped to inform the development of this report and provide a solid foundation to continue dialogue on the specific issues to be addressed in Metro Vision 2040, including community health and wellness.

Summary of Issues and Considerations

This section summarizes the key ideas and contents of this report. More detail on each topic is provided in the sections that follow.

KEY AREAS OF PROGRESS AND REGIONAL CHALLENGES

There are many efforts that are working well to address community health and wellness across the Denver region, including coalition building, education and awareness initiatives, grassroots efforts, and the adoption of local policies and regulations. Despite these successes, some key health and wellness-related challenges in the Denver region include the following:

- There is a growing divide between healthy and unhealthy populations in the Denver region, stemming from many different factors including socio-economic status, access to care, community awareness and education, and food and nutrition options.
- Overall patterns of development and transportation options present many barriers for leading active lifestyles and making healthy choices.
- It can be challenging to retrofit and adapt established areas to enhance community health and wellness; however, building new, health-supporting neighborhoods and communities presents unique challenges too.
- Rapid changes in the health care industry make it difficult to keep up with new trends and technology and to anticipate health care providers' long-term land use, transportation, economic, and other needs.

DRCOG'S ROLE IN ADDRESSING COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Metro Vision 2040 could directly address the topic of health and wellness, and integrate and connect the topic to other regional goals and policies. Moreover, DRCOG could provide leadership across the region, and facilitate ongoing discussion and action among regional stakeholders. DRCOG could also develop a toolkit for local action that:

- Maintains a central portal of information to support local efforts;
- Increases awareness and recognition; and
- Provides education and training.

PATHWAYS FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES TO ENHANCE HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Local communities have a role in pursuing their own strategies to enhance their health and wellness. Some key steps for consideration include:

- Initiating the conversation;
- Building a coalition of partners;
- Establishing a supportive policy and regulatory foundation;
- Identifying actions necessary to move forward; and
- Establishing a mechanism to track progress.

Key Areas of Progress and Regional Challenges

This section begins with a summary of achievements and efforts that seem to be working well across the Denver region to address and improve community health and wellness. These key areas of progress reflect the common themes and conclusions that emerged from conversations with health and wellness stakeholders during focus groups and other outreach activities. This section also includes discussion of the major challenges related to community health and wellness in the Denver region.

Key Areas of Progress

There are hundreds of efforts related to community health and wellness happening across the nation, state, and the Denver region. Many of these are spearheaded by governmental entities, such as state offices and county health departments, and others are led by for-profit and non-profit organizations and foundations. At all levels, interest and enthusiasm about planning for and building healthy communities is growing, and the following are examples of what seems to be working well in the Denver region:

- **Coalition Building.** A broad network of planners, public health experts, community leaders, engaged citizens, developers, and others are starting to connect together to share ideas and expertise, and to explore innovative solutions to address local and regional health and wellness issues. This regional coalition of community health and wellness supporters is growing rapidly and these emerging relationships are breeding new ideas and creative approaches.
- **Education and Awareness.** As the coalition of community health and wellness supporters expands, so does awareness of community health-related issues and opportunities and knowledge about potential solutions to tackle these challenges. For example, those who are involved with land use and transportation decisions are becoming increasingly aware of the health impacts of certain decisions and consider them when evaluating or recommending different options. Likewise, some regional and community leaders are beginning to draw connections between community health and other topics like economics and the natural environment due to the sharing of knowledge and exposure to different ideas. Programs like Safe Routes to School are helping remove barriers that prevent children from walking or bicycling to school, and help generate interest and enthusiasm for health and wellness in the youth population. Despite these successes, there is a growing divide at the local level in terms of health and wellness education and awareness – some communities are taking on the issue while others are not. This growing divide is discussed as a key challenge on page 14.

- **Grassroots Efforts.** Not all successful efforts across the region are government led. Instead, neighborhood groups, coalitions of citizens, and small businesses are becoming increasingly active in enhancing their own health and wellness, and the health and wellness of others. Efforts such as community gardens, neighborhood fitness programs, and farmers' markets are just a few examples of this community engagement and advocacy in action across the region.
- **Policies and Regulations.** Many communities across the region have taken steps to remove barriers to and improve opportunities for healthy living through their local policy and regulatory frameworks. This includes integrating the topics of health and wellness into local visions and comprehensive plans, and reviewing and updating development codes and other codes and policies. For example, recent interest and demand from residents to be able to raise hens in an urban environment for eggs and fertilizer purposes, has led many communities to scrutinize and modify their animal and livestock regulations to permit these practices. Others have amended their street standards and adopted new street cross-sections for new and existing development to allow for a wider variety of multi-modal options and better support active transportation modes such as walking and biking. The range of efforts in this arena is broad, yet progress is being made to enhance community health and wellness through local policy and regulatory means. However, these local efforts lack consistency and continuity between communities, and a more coordinated regional strategy and approach could lead to greater health benefits and outcomes in all communities.

Key Regional Challenges

While there are many notable accomplishments and recent success stories in addressing community health and wellness across the Denver region, some major regional health and wellness trends warrant consideration as DRCOG updates Metro Vision.

GROWING HEALTH DIVIDE

Many public health professionals note that their work usually focuses on different populations, such as seniors or persons with diabetes. By contrast, planners often focus on jurisdictions or specific geographical areas or communities. This distinction is important because many of the region's health-related issues and challenges affect different groups of people in various ways, regardless of jurisdictional boundaries. Across the Denver region, there are tremendous variations in the health of different population groups. Some populations are improving in health and living longer, while others are experiencing increasing rates of illness and disease, difficulties in accessing medical care, and shorter life expectancies. For example, according to the 2013 Health Disparities Report, in Colorado,

In Colorado, "seventy-five percent of American Indian/Alaska Native adults are overweight or obese, compared with nearly two-thirds of African American/Black and Hispanic/Latino adults (64 percent and 61 percent respectively), and just over half of all White adults (54 percent)

***Health Disparities: The 2013 Report
Exploring Health Equity in Colorado's 10
Winnable Battles***

“the HIV rate among African American/Black men in Colorado is over three times the rate among White men” and “the rate among African American/Black women is nearly 16 times the rate for White women.”⁷ Another example of the major differences between different population groups is that “seventy-five percent of American Indian/Alaska Native adults are overweight or obese, compared with nearly two-thirds of African American/Black and Hispanic/Latino adults (64 percent and 61 percent respectively), and just over half of all White adults (54 percent).⁸

Addressing this growing divide between healthy and unhealthy populations in the Denver region is a significant challenge, as is addressing the growing gap of knowledge and awareness of the relationship of health to local and regional planning. Some of the factors that are influencing these disparities include socio-economic status and access to care, community health awareness and education, and food and nutrition options.

Demographic and Socio-Economic Factors

Individual and family demographics, economic status, and other social factors contribute tremendously to a person’s overall health and wellness. For example, there is a strong correlation between education levels and individual health; research suggests that one of the strongest predictors of health is high school graduation rate, and those with higher levels of education are likely to experience better health over their lifetimes.⁹ Moreover, health

In terms of age-related health disparities, Colorado’s adults lead the nation as the leanest, yet the state’s childhood obesity rate is one of the fastest growing in the nation, with one in four Colorado children classified as overweight or obese.

Childhood Obesity Facts, LiveWell Colorado

disparities and educational achievement are closely related, and those with less education are more likely to engage in behaviors that put their health at risk, such as smoking and lack of physical activity.

Education is just one of many demographic or socio-economic factors intricately linked to health and wellness. Others include, but are not limited to: age, race, ethnic group, income, and family status. In terms of age-related health disparities, Colorado’s adults lead the nation as the leanest, yet the state’s childhood obesity rate is one of the fastest growing in the nation, with one in four Colorado children classified as overweight or obese.¹⁰ Obesity rates also vary by race/ethnicity, with higher rates among Hispanic/Latino, African American/Black, and American Indian/Alaska Native populations than White

⁷ Health Disparities Report. Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, 2013.

<http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/CDPHE-Main/CBON/1251647897443>. Accessed March 3, 2014.

⁸ Health Disparities Report. Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, 2013.

<http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/CDPHE-Main/CBON/1251647897443>. Accessed March 3, 2014.

⁹ Freudenberg N, Ruglis J. Reframing school dropout as a public health issue. *Prev Chronic Dis* 2007;4(4).

http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2007/oct/07_0063.htm. Accessed February 20, 2014.

¹⁰ Childhood Obesity Facts. LiveWell Colorado, 2014. http://livewellcolorado.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/LWC_ChildhoodObesityFacts_Sources.pdf. Accessed February 20, 2014.

and Asian/Pacific Islander populations. Moreover, higher obesity rates are associated with lower incomes and poverty status.

The relationships between health, demographic characteristics, and socio-economic factors are complicated, yet critical to consider and understand when addressing community health and wellness at a regional level. Approaches to improve overall health and wellness must be tailored to the distinct cultural characteristics and vulnerabilities of different populations within and across local jurisdictional boundaries.

Access to Care

Like the growing health divide between different demographic and socio-economic groups, there is also a widening gap in the region in terms of health care accessibility. While recent health insurance reforms will likely help some residents with health insurance coverage, affordability of medical care remains a major challenge. High costs reduce access to care for lower income households, which not only affects overall health, but also ripples through the community and region in other ways. For example, when a high percentage of household income is spent on health insurance coverage or health care, it means less income is available for other household expenses such as housing, food, transportation, and goods and services. These factors shape where people can live and work, and how they travel and spend money around the region. Similarly, community and regional issues like lack of affordable housing can result in some people paying a significant portion of their income towards housing and foregoing medical care and/or insurance as a result, which negatively affect overall health.

Access to care is also shaped by the number, type, and locations of medical providers and facilities in the region. Some communities and populations in the Denver area have abundant options and plentiful opportunities for residents to access and select from medical providers and health care facilities. In contrast, residents in some areas may be more limited in their health care options due to location, transportation, financial, or other reasons. For example, a resident living in the urban portion of Denver has access to many hospitals and clinics, some of which are likely accessible via transit. However, a resident living in a community on the urban fringe or in a non-urban area, like a rural town on the eastern plains, will most likely have limited options for medical care in-town, will have to travel greater distances to access care, and face more limitations related to out-of network providers. In order to enhance the overall health and wellness of the regional population, the factors that shape access, including the types, locations, convenience, accessibility, and affordability of health care facilities and providers, must be considered.

Health Knowledge and Awareness

Another growing gap is knowledge and awareness of the relationship between community health and local and regional planning. Some organizations, counties, and communities in the region are national leaders in exploring and addressing ways to improve community health and wellness through land use, transportation, economic, and other initiatives. They have built strong coalitions of supporters and are partnering together to create positive change and improve community health.

However, for various reasons, not all communities in the region are on board with these initiatives and efforts. Some communities do not fully understand the connections between local and regional planning and community health, and see health as a topic that is to be addressed by health departments working in isolation, not as part of a team with land use and transportation planners, advocacy groups, and many others. They may not understand how closely a community's health is connected to its land use patterns, transportation network, economic success, or environmental systems, and they may not see the relationships between these topics through a health perspective.

There is also a growing gap in terms of exposure and awareness of existing community health efforts. Some communities may not be aware of the momentum building in this state and region, or have not been exposed to the relevant health data or emerging initiatives that could affect their communities. Others may lack political support or local resources to begin to better understand or address the issues.

Unfortunately this gap in education and awareness at the local leadership and planning level is creating a region where some communities are excelling and taking major strides in enhancing health and wellness, and others are falling behind, and are not providing the same opportunities for their populations.

Food Options and Nutrition

Availability and affordability of food also shapes nutrition and overall health. Access to and consumption of nutritious foods, such as fruits and vegetables, supports good health, while consumption of unhealthy foods may lead to health issues such as diabetes or obesity. Food and nutrition is influenced by costs of food, and the availability and proximity of grocery stores, specialty and convenience food stores, restaurants, farmers' markets, and other food outlets and distributors.

The divide between those who are able to afford and access fresh and healthy foods, and those who cannot, is growing. For example, according to Hunger Free Colorado, "nearly 1 in 4 households with children (22%) in Colorado reported food hardship (meaning they experienced a time when there was not enough money to buy food for themselves or their family) between 2008 and 2012."¹¹ For some people, it may simply be a matter of

"Nearly 1 in 4 households with children (22%) in Colorado reported food hardship (meaning they experienced a time when there was not enough money to buy food for themselves or their family) between 2008 and 2012."

Hunger Free Colorado

convenience or location, and food options near their neighborhood may be limited to fast food restaurants or convenience stores. For others, the costs of fresher or healthier foods, limited time to devote to cooking at home, or a lack of cooking skills may lead them to choose less healthy options.

¹¹ Food Research and Action Center, *Food Hardship 2008-2012: Geography and Household Composition*, September 2013.

Finally, for some populations, access to any food, healthy or not, is an economic challenge, and many residents of the region go hungry each day.

Opportunities to grow food also influence individuals' food choices and options. Various studies show that those who are able to grow their own food or easily access fresh and affordable food from nearby farmers' markets or community gardens are more likely to gain an interest in and eat recommended amounts of fruits, vegetables, and other nutritious options.¹²

Food safety is another important challenge shaping health and nutrition across the region. Public health departments are stretched financially to prevent foodborne illness outbreaks, inspect food service operations, and ensure compliance with food regulations to assure that residents are provided with safe food. As more communities look to improve access to locally grown and produced food products, through community gardens, food trucks and stands, specialty products, and other avenues, it is also necessary for them to consider and satisfy food health and safety regulations and the resources needed to implement those activities.

¹² Highlights from Journal Articles. Cornell University Department of Horticulture, 2014. <http://blogs.cornell.edu/garden/grow-your-program/research-that-supports-our-work/highlights-from-journal-articles/>. Accessed March 3, 2013.

LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION PATTERNS

As mentioned above, the accessibility of care is a key factor that contributes to the overall health of a population. Yet, the location of care providers is not the only land use or transportation related factor that shapes community health and wellness. Overall patterns of development and transportation options to all destinations, not just care facilities, present many challenges for health and wellness across the region.

One example is the layout of blocks and streets in communities and the impact they have on leading an active lifestyle. Populations that engage in physical activity, such as walking, are more likely to be healthy than those who do not. Areas with blocks that are compact and walkable, with safe sidewalk and crossing facilities that connect people to desirable destinations make it more inviting to walk and lead an active lifestyle than areas with blocks that are long, indirect, or do not lead anywhere.

The following are development and transportation-related factors and challenges that influence community health and wellness in the region:

- **Transportation Options.** Balanced transportation choices, including walking, bicycling, and public transportation systems, can bring health benefits to communities. Studies show that people who commute long distances to work are generally less fit, weigh more, are less physically active, and have higher blood pressure than those with short commutes, or other transportation options such as bicycling, walking, or public transit.¹³ Moreover, long commutes leave less time available for other activities such as exercising or cooking healthy meals. Safe and convenient access to transportation options such as walking, biking, or public transit provides opportunities for populations to experience less stress and blend physical activity and transportation needs, which can positively influence overall health. Furthermore, shorter commutes, transit use, and schools that can be safely accessed by bicycle or pedestrians can help reduce vehicle trips, which can in turn help improve air quality, a major health-related issue.
- **Location and Intensity of Development.** The location and pattern of development, including residential or nonresidential, shapes the travel patterns of the regional population. Neighborhoods located far away from employment and commercial areas mean that residents usually have to spend more time and expense traveling between destinations. A mix of development intensities help improve options for the region's residents so that they can choose to live near their places of employment and/or desired shops and services, and spend more time pursuing leisure, recreation, and other activities that support good health, and less time commuting.

¹³ Hoehner, C. Commuting Distance, Cardiorespiratory Fitness, and Metabolic Risk. *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*, 2012; 42(6). <http://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797%2812%2900167-5/abstract> . Accessed March 4, 2014.

- **Variety of Land Uses.** As with the location and intensity of development, the mix of land uses in developed areas contributes to regional health. A mix of land uses, either vertically (on top of one another and/or within the same building) or horizontally (near each other, but not necessarily in the same building) provide options to work, shop, dine, and/or live in locations that are convenient. Integration of uses such as schools, places of worship, and parks and plazas also provide opportunities for interaction and accessibility. Homogeneous developments, or those that lack variety in land uses, present many of the same challenges as less compact developments, in that residents often need to commute long distances to access services and satisfy daily shopping or employment needs, without having the option to walk to nearby destinations.
- **Accessibility of Parks, Trails, and Open Space.** Proximity to parks, open space, and trails also improves opportunities for recreation and physical activity. These amenities also provide opportunities for passive recreation and relaxation, enjoyment of nature, and interaction with others, factors that are also associated with health and wellness.
- **Food Options.** As noted above, the physical location and type of food options, including grocery stores, restaurants, convenience stores, markets, food pantries, and gardens, shape people's daily food decisions and as a result, their overall nutrition and health. Food deserts, or areas without easy access to healthy food, exist across the Denver region, and land use and transportation patterns play a critical role in determining where healthy food outlets can and will locate and succeed.

RETROFITTING EXISTING COMMUNITIES AND BUILDING HEALTHIER NEW COMMUNITIES

The region features a diverse mix of established neighborhoods and communities, and newly emerging places. While there are some common themes for all areas in terms of land use and transportation patterns, as discussed in the previous section, there are some very distinct opportunities and challenges associated with retrofitting existing neighborhoods and communities to improve health and wellness. These unique challenges and considerations apply as well to newly developing areas.

Retrofitting Existing Areas

Across the Denver region, many different eras of design contribute to the existing patterns of development. Many traditional or historic neighborhoods were built on a gridded network of streets and feature compact, walkable blocks, and homes in close proximity to shopping, services, and other gathering places. Other established suburban neighborhoods provide larger lots and curvilinear streets, and typically require use of an automobile since they are often farther away from shopping and services.

Small incremental changes, rather than costly, large-scale projects may be most realistic or effective in retrofitting existing areas to support community health and wellness. Areas that are already well set up from a land use or transportation perspective, such as traditional neighborhoods, might provide inspiration or metrics to inform adaptations and healthy improvements in existing neighborhoods. Discussions with residents and neighborhoods groups can also help determine and prioritize needs.

The health- and wellness-related challenges facing existing communities, neighborhoods, and corridors differ, but some issues are fairly common and recurring. Local governments could be focusing on improving the health and wellness of these existing areas by adjusting the plans, policies, and regulations to facilitate positive change through infill, redevelopment, and other targeted projects and initiatives. Common health and wellness-related challenges associated with existing areas include the following:

- **Established Land Uses and Development Patterns.** In many existing, older neighborhoods and corridors, the layout of parcel, blocks, and use of land are often well-established, and it may be difficult to make major changes to support healthier communities without facing major obstacles such as costs, physical space, or resistance from neighbors. For example, it is more difficult to integrate a new park or trail into an established neighborhood than a developing one because a suitable property or easement for such an amenity may not be available and longtime residents may not want activity levels or uses to change near their homes. However, pursuing such retrofits and amenities can lead to many positive health benefits and outcomes.
- **Roadway Constraints.** Many existing roadways lack sufficient right-of-way to incorporate a variety of transportation modes. Some lack sidewalks or bike lanes, and others lack directness or connectivity to link people to their desired destinations. Competing priorities on roadways, including moving traffic, providing safe routes for bicyclists and pedestrians, integrating transit service, and maintaining attractive corridors, means that communities must be strategic and deliberate about which roadways are optimal to retrofit, and which improvements will most positively benefit overall health and wellness.
- **Restrictive Regulations and/or Covenants.** Beyond the physical layout of existing developments and roadways providing barriers to enhancing community health, some existing development regulations and/or covenants also limit opportunities to promote healthy living. Regulations and covenants related to farmers' markets, community gardens, the keeping of animals (fowl, bees, or livestock) for food or agricultural purposes (e.g., to supply eggs, milk, or honey, or to produce fertilizer), and other health-related activities vary by neighborhood or jurisdiction, presenting challenges for residents to understand and pursue opportunities to improve their health. For example, regulations or covenants that prohibit front yard gardens might mean that some residents cannot easily grow their own produce if their front yard is most suitable for gardening due to available sunlight or the need to separate backyard pets from growing food.

Building Healthier New Communities

While it can be easier to integrate health-supportive development patterns and transportation options into newly developing areas, it is not yet the norm for all new developments. Some developers are leading the charge across the region and recognize the value of providing amenities such as nearby parks, trails, community gardens, and opportunities for producing food. However, in some cases this leads to higher costs for residents to live in these new developments, which in turn may make them less accessible to a broad population.

On the other hand, some communities lack political support or development regulations that encourage health-supporting development patterns or transportation options. Some new development is also replicating previous trends and patterns; occurring in areas that are far removed, disconnected from existing development or transportation networks, and lacking fundamental elements that support health like access to parks and safe sidewalks. These development patterns increase reliance on automobiles and sometimes lack adequate options for residents to engage in recreation or conveniently access shops, services, or employment.

A clear vision, goals, and policies for community health and wellness in local comprehensive plans, as well as supportive development regulations are needed in order to shift the paradigm for new development across the region.

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Beyond the transportation and land use patterns associated with development, the quality of the region's natural environment and resources also greatly contribute to community health and wellness. The quality of the region's air directly relates to many community health outcomes. For example, "due to higher levels of air pollution, living within 500 feet of a freeway is associated with an increased risk of asthma, impaired lung growth, atherosclerosis, low cognitive function, autism, Alzheimer disease, and lower IQ in children with prenatal exposure."¹⁴ DRCOG and other partners across the region are already working to address air pollution from a variety of sources, including motor vehicles, and commercial and industrial sources, but poor air quality remains a threat to the health of the region's residents.

Similarly, the quality of water across the region also shapes health and wellness. Many Colorado communities, most of which are small, rural, or economically disadvantaged, are exposed to high levels of uranium or radium in drinking water, which is associated with increased cancer risk and kidney disease.¹⁵ Stormwater runoff, water sources, and water treatment and distributions systems all factor into the quality of the region's water – elements that are closely linked to regional planning and development.

Other environmental quality issues potentially present in the region that could present challenges to community health and wellness include, but are not limited to, exposure to hazardous chemicals, loss of biodiversity, natural disasters, and significant weather events.

CHANGING HEALTH CARE DELIVERY SYSTEM

The national and regional health care delivery system is rapidly changing due to rising health care costs, health insurance reforms, and competition for quality and convenience. Many providers are responding to these challenges by adapting facilities, merging together, and/or moving toward closed systems or networks. Likewise, many pharmacy chains and large employers are now adding in-house health care

¹⁴ Health Disparities Report. Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, 2013.
<http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/CDPHE-Main/CBON/1251647897443>. Accessed March 3, 2014.

¹⁵ Ibid.

clinics, and large health providers are expanding and adapting existing facilities to integrate new technologies, and building new facilities to consolidate services or reach new populations.

The long-term effects of this changing health care delivery system are not clear, but most share common objectives in increasing quality of and access to care and options for patients. However, as this landscape shifts, other potential long-term impacts may include changes in facility and land use needs, different travel patterns, new infrastructure requirements, and evolving economic impacts. Continued conversations between the health care industry, DRCOG, and local communities are critical to ensuring that these potential opportunities and impacts of these system changes are considered and addressed thoughtfully and comprehensively.

DRCOG's Role in Addressing Community Health and Wellness

The role of DRCOG in addressing community health and wellness at a regional level has not been clearly defined yet, nor has Metro Vision been updated to reflect this growing topic of interest. This section explores the potential role of DRCOG, and includes ideas about how health and wellness could be addressed at a regional level through Metro Vision and other DRCOG initiatives.

Regional Goals and Policies

While it is important to address many health and wellness opportunities and challenges at the local or even neighborhood level, those currently engaged on the issue recognize the need to focus on the topic collectively as a region as well, and see various potential roles for DRCOG in addressing community health and wellness at a regional level. The Denver region is among the healthiest in the country, and clear regional vision, goals, and action strategies are essential in coordinating the efforts of many to maintain this distinction. The following sections address community health and wellness and their role in the region's current Metro Vision 2035 Plan, and suggestions for how the 2040 Plan might build on that foundation.

METRO VISION 2035 PLAN

The Metro Vision 2035 Plan addresses community health and wellness indirectly through topics such as transportation choices, development patterns, and community design, but does not clearly articulate the regional importance of or issues and challenges associated with community health and wellness. One of the most closely related principles of the Plan is that "Metro Vision protects and enhances the region's quality of life," yet the important role of health and wellness in the shaping the region's quality of life is not apparent.

Moreover, Metro Vision 2035 does not clearly discuss the connections between community health and wellness and other topics such as economic development and environmental quality and resources. Key concepts of Metro Vision 2035 include accommodating all ages, incomes and abilities, providing bicycle and pedestrian accessibility, providing an integrated regional parks, trails, and open space system, ensuring clean water and ecological balance, and improving air quality—all of these concepts inherently shape community health and wellness but direct discussion of this relationship is missing in the Metro Vision 2035 Plan. The lack of direct discussion in the Metro Vision 2035 introduction or policies makes it challenging to clearly understand the key role that regional policies and actions play in shaping community health and wellness, and makes supporting health and wellness appear to be an unintended outcome, rather than a key component of the vision for the future.

METRO VISION 2040

To emphasize the importance of community health and wellness in the Denver region, the Metro Vision 2040 Plan could build on health and wellness concepts established previously while providing more detail surrounding some of the challenges discussed in this report. Metro Vision 2040 could seize the opportunity to serve as a nationwide model for addressing community health and wellness at the regional level. In particular, Metro Vision 2040 could do the following:

- Include an introductory section that clearly defines community health and wellness as a key area of focus. Metro Vision could emphasize up front why this is a topic of regional importance as addressed on page 4.
- Provide a standalone chapter that addresses community health and wellness and integrate references to community health and wellness throughout other plan elements and policies.
- Support and match the emphasis already being placed on community health and wellness both regionally and at the local government level.

Leadership

As the Regional Planning Commission and the Metropolitan Planning Organization, DRCOG plays a major role in providing leadership on important issues and how they impact its member jurisdictions. One of the ways DRCOG provides leadership is by maintaining Metro Vision. Other ways that DRCOG can guide the region include the following:

- **Incorporate community health into the decision-making process.** DRCOG can continually stress the importance of community health as it pertains to the region. Decisions made at the local level and regional level could include additional criteria for evaluation of community health and wellness performance, such as land use and transportation, bicycle and pedestrian mobility, and design of the built environment. Many focus group participants and other stakeholders have recommended that DRCOG consider ways to expand the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)¹⁶ project criteria and evaluation process to incorporate elements of community health and wellness. For example, projects could be given higher priority if they improve access to healthy foods for a given geography, or if the project expands mobility options and increases overall connectivity of an area. Linking TIP criteria in this manner would send a clear message to member communities and regional stakeholders that the built environment consider health and wellness in design and implementation.
- **Integrate health and wellness into other regional efforts.** DRCOG also has an opportunity to address health and wellness through its other major efforts and focus areas, such as aging and

¹⁶ A *Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)* identifies all federally funded transportation projects in the Denver region over a six-year period. It is prepared by DRCOG every four years, and must show that it meets air quality requirements. The current cycle of TIP criteria updates is already well underway; however, this recommendation could be given consideration during the next update cycle.

regional air quality. There may not be a consensus by all member jurisdictions to include health and wellness as a separate topic in Metro Vision, so including health considerations in other conversations might provide effective avenues to discuss the topic. For example, other Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), especially those in California, focus on air quality as a critical regional issue, and that focus has helped drive healthy transportation and land use policies.

- **Build on existing programs and tools.** Even though DRCOG's role in addressing community health and wellness at a regional level has not been clearly defined yet, DRCOG has already employed several useful tools that are working to improve the region's well-being. For instance, the Boomer Bond initiative is intended to improve a community's readiness to support the ever growing older population. Capitalizing on earlier success, DRCOG could make adjustments and/or expand existing tools to more directly address community health and wellness. Most of the major tenets of the initiative (e.g., mobility and access, and community design for active aging) would benefit all populations, regardless of demographic position. In other words, community design for an 80-year old also serves the eight-year-old as well.

Another emerging tool is the Denver Regional Equity Atlas, which can be updated periodically to portray an accurate snapshot of the region's ability to equitably address community health and wellness. Other existing programs to emphasize include DRCOG's Area Agency on Aging services, and the Community Care Transitions Program (CCTP), which focuses on helping improve patient transitions as they move between care settings.

In addition to building on these existing programs, DRCOG might pursue cross funding opportunities to support health and wellness across the region, such as coordinating with other Colorado Area Agencies of Aging, which have ties to some of DRCOG's rural communities and other Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) throughout the region and state.

Regional Convener

Another critical role of DRCOG is to act as the regional convener of various stakeholders related to a particular issue or subject matter. In the case of community health and wellness, there are various stakeholders that would not typically come together without the support and organization of a credible regional entity. Some of the essential stakeholders in a community health and wellness dialogue include:

- **Health Care Providers.** An individual's physical health is important to their overall quality of life. Health care providers have their finger on the pulse of our regional population. Their unique perspective can assist the region in better understanding some of the bigger equity challenges such as access to health care, access to healthy foods, and the physical and environmental conditions that are affecting the lives of our region's individuals.
- **Local Governments.** One of DRCOG's greatest strengths is its ability to facilitate a collaborative discussion with its member jurisdictions. It will be important to involve not only planners and elected officials, but also others involved in local government that influence

community health and wellness. In many cases, the local community planner is the first stop for development activity and long-range policy development. Trained planners are able to present complex issues to varying backgrounds, and to provide context for how our current decisions have a lasting impact on the built environment. Local elected officials depend on their staff to make recommendations that are in the best interest of the community. By participating in a regional discussion, planners are better equipped to develop effective strategies, policies, and implementation tools that improve the region's health and wellness. Others to include in the dialogue might include staff from engineering and public works, senior services, economic development, parks and open space, and other relevant departments that either directly or indirectly have an impact on the community's well-being.

- **State and Regional Agencies.** DRCOG is in a unique position to convene and interact with state and other regional agencies, such as Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), Regional Transportation District (RTD), Department of Local Affairs (DOLA), Colorado Department of Health and Environment (CDPHE), and others to work across disciplines and organizations, because all of them are already working independently on many issues of health and wellness. Additionally, many of the most problematic environments in the region (from a health and wellness perspective) are interjurisdictional in nature, such as some of the area's long roadway corridors. Because no municipality or county is solely responsible for them, they would benefit from regional coordination and leadership from DRCOG in convening local, regional, and state agencies together to revitalize these areas to make them support regional health and wellness.
- **Public Health Organizations.** Hearing directly from public health organizations informs the region on the overall condition of its human assets, what health trends are emerging nationally and at the regional level, and provides a unique perspective on how the built environment impacts our health and wellness. The region's public health organizations have played an integral role in recent years conducting research and analysis related to the physical environment, and in communicating our region's largest health and wellness challenges.
- **Other Stakeholders.** For any discussion that impacts the region, it is important to cast a wide net when convening the stakeholders. In addition to those listed above, there are other stakeholders that could be included in a regional discussion on community health and wellness. This might include business leaders, the development community, foundations, advocacy groups, insurance providers, special districts (e.g., fire and park districts), school districts, and neighborhood associations to name a few. With multiple perspectives comes a more unified strategy for addressing health and wellness at the regional scale.

Toolkit for Local Action

In addition to establishing and updating regional policies related to community health and wellness as part of Metro Vision 2040, DRCOG could build a "toolkit" for local action to help implement the Plan's recommendations following adoption. The concept of a toolkit for local action is envisioned as a resource for its member jurisdictions when considering their own local decision-making process related

to several topics, including community health and wellness. Community context – whether urban, suburban, or rural – is essential for any tools included in the toolkit, thus the toolkit must recognize the differing needs and circumstances in the region's communities.

This section will discuss several opportunities for DRCOG to provide useful tools for its member jurisdictions, ranging from public outreach and awareness efforts to data and sample land use ordinances. In addition to playing a meaningful role by providing guidance and leadership and convening essential stakeholders, DRCOG could collect and maintain data and information, provide education and technical training, and recognize exemplary community health and wellness plans, policies, projects, and strategies throughout the region. This section is not an exhaustive list of potential items for inclusion in a toolkit, but rather a starting point for further dialogue related to community health and wellness. The following section of this report establishes potential pathways for communities to enhance community health and wellness; ultimately these strategies could also end up within this "toolkit."

CENTRAL PORTAL FOR INFORMATION

DRCOG could play a major role in the collection and storage of data and information. Whether looking for comparative data on how other communities are addressing an issue, or links to other sources of information, local governments could benefit from a centralized data source maintained by DRCOG. Because communities often suffer from "information overload," DRCOG could add value by distilling the most effective and relevant sources in a meaningful way.

- **Model Local Regulations.** Communities throughout the region are addressing community health and wellness challenges through various regulatory mechanisms. DRCOG could inventory development regulations and stand-alone ordinances. For example, what are the various ways local governments are addressing community gardens, markets and produce stands, and urban agriculture? Are they called out as a specific permitted use in key zoning districts? Do community gardens count toward required open space? What types of use-specific standards are in place for limiting potential impacts on neighborhoods? DRCOG could collect the various methodologies and make them available to its member jurisdictions. DRCOG could also reference existing resources, such as the HEAL Library provided by LiveWell Colorado, to connect local communities to example and model regulations.¹⁷
- **Measuring Progress.** Stakeholders have also indicated that another role for DRCOG could be to take stock on how local governments are measuring progress related to community health and wellness. Rather than reinventing the process, DRCOG can offer examples throughout the region for how some communities are using metrics and tracking systems to help guide their decision-making processes. Using these various metrics and systems, DRCOG might develop a system for tracking the overall health and wellness of the Denver region. This could range from

¹⁷ HEAL Library. LiveWell Colorado. <https://about.livewellcolorado.org/livewell-toolbox/heal-library/heal-library>. Accessed April 1, 2014.

analysis and documentation of health data to a “trends dashboard” that monitors the health of the region, perhaps by county, based on certain criteria and characteristics. Another option would be for DRCOG to create or reference a consolidated database that pulls data from other health and wellness agencies and partners into one centralized, easily accessible online location.

- **Partners and Supporters.** In addition to serving the role of regional convener, DRCOG can maintain a list of groups, organizations, and projects that influence community health and wellness throughout the region. DRCOG could categorize lists by type of organization, by topic, or by geography, among others. For example, DRCOG could maintain links to websites of organizations that provide data and grants for preparing Health Impact Assessments (HIAs)¹⁸, examples of Health Impact Assessments prepared by member communities, or a list of available datasets from a specific public health organization.
- **Regional Inventories and Assessments.** To help advance efforts at the local level, DRCOG could continue to pursue opportunities to develop regional inventories and assessments on topics relevant to the issue of community health and wellness. For example, the Denver Regional Equity Atlas provides local governments and the community with access to a wealth of information on a variety of relevant topics to support local initiatives and promote education. Another example would be to develop a regional food system assessment and plan with the intent of accomplishing similar objectives.

AWARENESS AND RECOGNITION

One of the most effective ways to support sound policies and implementation measures is to celebrate successes along the way. Local governments pay close attention to their peer communities, and are generally encouraged to replicate success stories. A regional awards or recognition program would help increase regional awareness surrounding community health and wellness, and offer an incentive to local governments for taking a deeper look into their own internal systems, plans, and regulations. DRCOG has some existing awards and recognitions programs that could emphasize health more prominently, or a new program could be considered (such as a program similar to the Jefferson County Public Health Department's annual “Public Health Champions” award ceremony). Recognition of a job well done can help maintain momentum in a community, especially when time and resources are limited. Potential ideas for recognition at the regional level could include individuals, agencies, specific policies or regulations, or projects that have contributed to improving the region's health, wellness, and quality of life.

¹⁸ HIAs bring health considerations into decisions in fields such as housing, education, and transportation to produce policies and projects that can enhance people's ability to live healthier lives. <http://www.pewhealth.org/news-room/press-releases/health-impact-assessment-grants-awarded-to-make-health-a-routine-part-of-decision-making-85899505838#sthash.b56HOBpw.dpuf>. Accessed April 3, 2014.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

During the stakeholder outreach efforts, many noted the distinct role that DRCOG could play in providing local elected officials, administrators, and appointed officials with targeted education. Educational tools could range from handouts and memorandums, to webinars or live training sessions designed to equip local governments with information necessary to communicate with their constituents, make informed decisions, and to ultimately improve community health and wellness. Training could take the form of panel discussions, community forums, online presentations, topical research papers, or direct technical assistance. Some potential topics that may be immediately relevant to highlight with respect to community health and wellness in the region include:

- **Elected official training and leadership.** The region's decision makers play a critical role in shaping their community's future. Arming elected and appointed officials with necessary information to facilitate their understanding of key issues has always been a top priority for DRCOG and its member jurisdictions. Because there are so many intricacies related to community health and wellness, frequent and methodical outreach and education is a key to establishing strategies that work for a particular community. DRCOG can act proactively to address emerging issues, but also react to immediate needs of its membership by offering training and assistance as needed.
- **Local government staff training and assistance.** As previously stated in this report, local government decision makers rely heavily on their staff to provide clear recommendations supported by the community and based on technical expertise. Some communities have been focused on community health and wellness for years and have developed plans and codes to support their efforts, while others are just beginning to address the issue. Training local government staff is an important role for DRCOG, and ultimately improves the region's understanding of key issues related to community health and wellness. Such training could be oriented not just toward planners, but to the many other related disciplines involved in development review and community planning to promote ongoing coordination and collaboration at the local level.
- **Developer training.** Just as local government elected officials and staff require continual education to provide the best possible service to their community, so does the development community. Developers could benefit from DRCOG outreach efforts related to policies and regulations that impact community health and wellness. Most developers remain in tune with emerging planning issues and make it a priority to understand the reasoning behind local decision-making processes. DRCOG could indicate how market demands for walkable mixed-use products are closely related to a neighborhood's, community's, or region's health and wellness. Drawing similarities between health and wellness design features and market demands can also help developers better market their products to local governments and future tenants.

Opportunities for Local Communities to Enhance Health and Wellness

In addition to focusing on community health and wellness as a region, local communities have a role in pursuing their own strategies to enhance the health and wellness of their populations. While much is already being done in some communities to improve community health and wellness, these efforts are not necessarily consistent or coordinated across the Denver region. The following discussion establishes example strategies and actions that provide opportunities for local communities to pursue to support health and wellness at the local level. Many of these opportunities are also relevant at the regional level, and DRCOG and its partners have already taken some initial steps to address them. These opportunities may ultimately be supported by the Toolkit for Local Action, described in the previous section.

Initiate the Conversation

In order for any effort to be successful at the local or regional level, it is imperative to have support from leaders and decision-makers, as well as those who work to implement those decisions and initiatives on a daily basis. Communities and regions who wish to further their health and wellness planning and outcomes need to initiate a dialogue among municipal planners, engineers, health providers, and other internal and external departments and service providers to begin to understand the issues and opportunities associated with health and wellness in the community or region.

The conversation also needs to involve the public at-large, including those in at-risk or vulnerable populations, to develop an understanding of the public's health priorities, concerns, and needs. As part of developing a baseline of information about health issues and opportunities, it is necessary to involve elected and/or appointed officials in the conversation. Early engagement and ongoing communication with these decision makers is critical to inform them about local health-related issues and to expose them to new ideas about potential approaches or solutions.

Build a Coalition of Partners

It is evident that the health and wellness movement around the region is gaining momentum partly because of the broad coalition of supporters and partners involved. Many existing efforts and organizations can serve as tremendous resources when trying to tackle health and wellness issues at the local or regional level. Furthermore, not all efforts are external to a local government entity. For example, some planners may find tremendous support and resources for health and wellness planning within their parks, recreation, or economic development departments or partner organizations. Agencies and groups external to local government can also play a supporting role, and it is imperative to include county health departments, local health providers and professionals, advocacy groups,

neighborhood groups, the development community, business leaders, school districts, and other stakeholders in the conversation.

Establish a Supportive Policy and Regulatory Foundation

Once the conversation has been initiated and a coalition is building, local communities and regional entities should look to their own policies and regulations to identify any potential barriers, gaps, or incentives to improving health and wellness. In order to establish a supportive policy and regulatory foundation for health and wellness, jurisdictions could embark on a two-step process that first assesses existing plans, policies, and regulations, and then amending or adopting new policies or regulations to further the area's health and wellness goals. Health and wellness-related topics to explore within the plans, policies, and regulations include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Active Living.** Adopt plans, policies, and development regulations that encourage and facilitate active lifestyles, such as recreation opportunities and human-powered transportation modes like bicycling and walking. Plan for and adopt policies and regulations to support the development of sidewalks, trails, and parks, and the conservation of natural and open spaces to provide opportunities for recreation and to enable residents to connect with nature. Also consider barriers emerging from related factors such as safety concerns, the needs of different populations, overall convenience, accessibility, and costs.
- **Development Patterns.** Ensure that plans, policies, and regulations promote compact growth, mixed land uses, and/or provide mobility options for people of all ages and abilities. Adopt mixed-use zone districts that allow for a range of land uses such as different types of residential, office, services, and/or retail so that people have opportunities to meet a variety of daily needs by walking or biking to destinations or without needing to travel long distances or be saddled with long commutes in single-occupant vehicles. Mixed-use zoning can allow for a vertical or horizontal mix of uses, or both. Require connectivity between developments so that people can directly travel between areas, and do not have to unnecessarily travel around them. Also consider plans, policies, and regulations related to the land use and siting of health care providers or facilities to ensure that they are accessible for a diverse population.
- **Food Options.** Adopt zoning and development regulations that ensure opportunities for healthy food options in accessible locations (e.g., grocery stores, farmers' markets, and food pantries). Review zoning regulations for healthy food outlets (such as fast food restaurants and convenience stores) to ensure they are not concentrated in locations that lack access to other healthier options. Consider policies and regulations that make it easier for people to grow their own food, participate in community or cooperative gardens, and rear animals for food purposes.

Identify Actions Necessary to Move Forward

After reducing regulatory barriers and establishing a solid foundation of supporting plans and policies, communities and regions could establish a plan of action for implementing health and wellness-related objectives. This implementation strategy could detail the different types of actions that can be undertaken, such as plans, programs, improvement projects, and coordination among different groups. These actions could be categorized as immediate, near-term, or longer-term priorities. The action plan could also specify funding requirements and needs, estimated timeline for completion, and roles and responsibilities for different departments, organizations or individuals.

Another important step to take when identifying action strategies is to establish a “champion”—an individual or cooperative team to coordinate and oversee implementation. The champion does not need to lead the implementation of each action strategy, but rather, serve as a strong advocate, an organizer of efforts and coordinator between partners. This role is essential in tracking progress over time (as discussed in the following section), as well as leading the area in new directions and toward innovative solutions.

Establish a Mechanism to Track Progress Over Time

Communities and regions with a commitment to enhancing health and wellness can be deliberate and comprehensive in monitoring their progress and accomplishments. In order to evaluate success, it is necessary to have baseline data and point-in-time data after significant efforts have been made. For example, communities concerned with childhood obesity rates could document current childhood obesity rates and historic trends, and also establish a process to measure obesity rates in the future as the community works to address this challenge. These data points, or indicators, can be examined and monitored over time in relation to the community’s progress on implementing its action plan. While it may be difficult to prove direct causation between community or regional actions and health or wellness outcomes, the correlation between actions and indicators is often quite apparent.

When selecting indicators to monitor, it is important to be mindful of potential sources and the availability of data for different regions, jurisdictions, and/or populations. County health departments are often the most reliable sources for comprehensive health data; however, the county reporting structure means that it can be difficult to obtain data for smaller jurisdictions or populations without having to perform extensive research or analysis. Selection of indicators can also be focused on those that will be monitored and applicable over long periods since it can be difficult to track very narrow or specific indicators over time.

Finally, communities and regions can commit to tracking the status of their progress in implementing health-supportive policies, plans, programs, and regulations in addition to health-related indicators. It can take a long time to see dramatic changes in health and wellness, and documenting current efforts towards enhancing health will help connect them to health indicators when that data and those trends are monitored long-term.

Best Practices for Community Health and Wellness

This section includes examples of regions that have worked to address and enhance community health and wellness in a variety of ways. It also includes a summary of potential policy and regulatory approaches, as well as possible programs and projects to enhance local and regional health and wellness objectives.

Regional Models

The Denver region is not unique in that community health and wellness is a topic of growing regional interest. The following pages identify ways that other regions have approached and addressed community health and wellness through plans, policies, and other efforts.

- **Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC).**¹⁹ In its most recent plan, Plan 2040, the ARC identified “Encouraging Healthy Communities” as one of three values that are particularly supportive of its purpose statement. The ARC carried this value throughout the plan, including it in objectives, principles, and supporting documents such as *Fifty Forward, A Vision for the Future of Metro Atlanta*,²⁰ which focuses on issues of critical national and global importance, and includes “improving the Health of the Region” as one of its six major focus areas.
- **Greater Des Moines Partnership.** The Greater Des Moines Partnership is the economic and community development organization seeking to maximize local resources to address economic and community growth opportunities. The *Tomorrow Plan* is a regional planning effort focused on the sustainable development of Greater Des Moines, encouraging local communities to empower citizens to consider public health and environmental impact, among other challenges, in planning decisions.²¹ One of the plan’s four goals is to “further the health and well-being of all residents in the region,” and the resulting strategies include making walking, biking, and public transportation a normal part of daily life and providing access to healthy food. Through its Capital Crossroads project, the Greater Des Moines Partnership published plans for ten “capitals” identified throughout central Iowa.²² The “Wellness Capital” seeks to make the region a national model of wellness “by leveraging existing capacities and

¹⁹ Plan 2040, Atlanta Regional Commission.

http://documents.atlantaregional.com/plan2040/docs/lu_plan2040_framework_0711.pdf. Accessed March 6, 2014.

²⁰ Fifty Forward, Atlanta Regional Commission. <http://www.atlantaregional.com/about-us/public-involvement/atlanta-fifty-forward>. Accessed March 6, 2014.

²¹ The Tomorrow Plan, Greater Des Moines Partnership. <http://www.thetomorrowplan.com/documents/ttp-final.pdf>. Accessed March 6, 2014.

²² Capital Crossroads, Greater Des Moines Partnership. <http://www.capitalcrossroadsvision.com/>. Accessed March 6, 2014.

governmental, non-profit and corporate wellness efforts into a holistic wellness program for implementation in Des Moines-area communities.”

- **Metro Vancouver.** In its 2040 Regional Growth Strategy, entitled *Shaping Our Future*, Metro Vancouver includes strategies targeted at developing healthy communities, with policies that promote access to services and amenities such as healthy food, trails and recreation facilities, and transit.²³ The plan also suggest that municipalities assess overall health implications of proposed projects with input from public health authorities.
- **Mid-America Regional Council (MARC).** MARC, the metropolitan planning organization for the bi-state Kansas City region, prepared a *Kansas City Regional Health Assessment* for the REACH Foundation that analyzed health care coverage, access and health concerns of uninsured and other vulnerable populations in the Kansas City metropolitan area.²⁴ The report provided demographic data on vulnerable populations; health and disease data and trends; data on the insured and uninsured; access to care data and trends; and analysis of available data to help identify emerging issues or geographic areas of concern, including top issues for each county. In addition, MARC developed the *Equity Profile of the Kansas City Region* to help effectively address equity issues in planning for a more integrated and sustainable region.²⁵ The profile considered indicators including access to healthy food, resident health, and transportation choice. Lastly, MARC's *Toolkit for Making Communities Work for All Ages* is designed to help local government officials consider measures to improve the quality of life and opportunities for healthy living for older adult residents in metropolitan Kansas City's older suburbs.²⁶ The toolkit includes suggestions for the environment, housing, transportations, services and facilities, and health care.
- **Nashville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).**²⁷ The Nashville Area MPO has dedicated several health and well-being resources to the important linkages between transportation and health, including funding opportunities and a full-time staff position (Director of Healthy Communities).
- **Oregon Metro (MPO in Portland, Oregon).**²⁸ Metro's forecasting tools and applications include a transportation equity analysis as part of their regional flexible funding allocation program. In addition, the MPO identified “public health concerns” as an urgent challenge to

²³ Regional Growth Strategy, Metro Vancouver.

<http://www.metrovancouver.org/PLANNING/DEVELOPMENT/STRATEGY/Pages/default.aspx>. Accessed March 6, 2014.

²⁴Kansas City Regional Health Assessment Report, Mid-American Regional Council.

<http://reachhealth.org/goals/regionalhealthreport/>. Accessed March 6, 2014.

²⁵ Equity Profile of the Kansas City Region, Mid-American Regional Council. http://www.marc.org/Regional-Planning/Creating-Sustainable-Places/assets/Kansas-City_Profile_23August2013.aspx. Accessed March 6, 2014.

²⁶ Toolkit for Making Communities Work for All Ages, Mid-American Regional Council.

http://www.kc4aic.org/sites/resources/data/files/2013kccfaa_toolkitforweb.pdf. Accessed March 6, 2014.

²⁷ Nashville Area Metropolitan Plan Organization. http://www.nashvillempo.org/regional_plan/health/. Accessed March 6, 2014.

²⁸ Oregon Metro. <http://www.oregonmetro.gov/index.cfm/go/by.web/id=39026>. Accessed March 6, 2014.

planning for future growth. As a result, the Our Place in the World document incorporates planning for healthy and active lifestyles into each of its eight categories of aspirations.²⁹

- **Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) Regional Food Policy Council.**³⁰ Comprised of member governments, business representatives, non-profit organizations, and advocacy groups, this council develops strategies and recommendations to strengthen and sustain healthy communities through local and regional food systems.
- **Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission Regional Food System Assessment.**³¹ The Agriculture and Food Systems Working Group, a multi-county team convened by the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) spent more than a year examining the production, processing, distribution, and consumption of food throughout central Ohio with the purpose of developing a strategy for strengthening the economy, ensuring access to healthful food, reducing food-shipping distance, and preserving farmland.
- **Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) Greater Philadelphia Food System Study**³². DVRPC's planning area consists of nine counties- Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties in southeastern Pennsylvania; and Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, and Mercer counties in southern New Jersey. The Greater Philadelphia Food System Study, published in 2010, was undertaken to better understand the complicated regional food system that feeds Greater Philadelphia. DVRPC's food system study focuses on the agricultural resources, distribution infrastructure, regional economy, and stakeholders acting within the regional foodshed.

Local Approaches and Examples

The following pages highlight various policy, regulatory, programmatic approaches and programs for enhancing community health. This section addresses four separate, but interconnected, topics related to planning for community health and wellness: (1) access to health and wellness services, (2) active and healthy living, (3) food systems and nutrition, and (4) land uses and development patterns.

The ideas presented are intended to capture a wide range of approaches and serve as a quick reference guide for exposure to new ideas and a variety of possibilities for consideration. Examples from communities from across the DRCOG region provide additional context and support the overarching ideas. This section is not intended to serve as a comprehensive inventory of all strategies or approaches

²⁹ Our Place in the World, Oregon Metro. http://library.oregonmetro.gov/files/our_place_in_the_world.pdf. Accessed March 6, 2014.

³⁰ Puget Sound Regional Food Policy Council. <http://www.psrc.org/about/advisory/regional-food-policy-council/>. Accessed March 6, 2014.

³¹ Central Ohio Local Food Assessment and Plan. http://www.morpc.org/pdf/morpc_localfoodbrochure_executivesummary.pdf. Accessed April 3, 2014.

³² Greater Philadelphia Food System Study. http://www.dvrpc.org/asp/pubs/publicationabstract.asp?pub_id=09066B. Accessed April 3, 2014.

to enhance community health and wellness, nor is it a complete listing of all communities across the region that have addressed them.

Best Practice Approaches and Examples		
POLICY & REGULATORY APPROACHES	PROJECTS & PROGRAMS	EXAMPLES WITHIN THE DRCOG REGION
ACCESS TO HEALTH AND WELLNESS SERVICES		
<p>To improve accessibility of health and wellness facilities and services to residents, communities may consider the following policies or regulatory approaches:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowing health care clinics/services as permitted accessory uses in employment campuses, retail centers, and other populated areas • Connecting all major medical facilities (e.g., hospitals) to public transit service • Employing health impact assessments in development decision-making • Linking economic development incentives to employers that address community health care needs • Locating new health and wellness facilities in easily accessible areas • Permitting small-scale clinics/ wellness services as home occupations 	<p>Some potential programs, projects, and other community initiatives to enhance access to health and wellness services include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community health care and wellness events • Employee wellness and prevention programs • Improvements and expansions to Call-n-Ride services • Private and/or non-profit transportation programs for special populations or medical facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The University of Colorado Hospital Community Health Needs Assessment identifies access to care as one of its priority health issues, and provides detailed data and lists resources to help address the issue.³³ • Seniors’ Resource Center Transportation Services provides accessible and affordable transportation to older adults and those with mobility impairments in Adams, Clear Creek Gilpin, and Jefferson counties.³⁴ • The Denver Wellness program focuses on supporting City and County of Denver employees on their way to wellness by providing health information, wellness activities, and culturally inclusive opportunities to improve health.³⁵

³³ University of Colorado Community Health Needs Assessment. <http://www.uch.edu/about/community-health-needs-assessment/>. Accessed March 3, 2014.

³⁴ Seniors’ Resource Center. <http://www.srcaging.org/transportation>. Accessed March 3, 2014.

³⁵ Denver Wellness Program. <http://www.denvergov.org/humanresources/EmployeeResources/Wellness/DenverWellnessProgram/tabid/432532/Default.aspx>. Accessed March 3, 2014.

Best Practice Approaches and Examples		
POLICY & REGULATORY APPROACHES	PROJECTS & PROGRAMS	EXAMPLES WITHIN THE DRCOG REGION
ACTIVE AND HEALTHY LIVING		
<p>In order to enhance opportunities for residents to lead active and healthy lifestyles, communities may adopt policies to support or enact development regulations to address the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate lighting on sidewalks and/or trails • Complete streets and/or street cross sections that incorporate all transportation modes • Compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements (e.g., parking, building entrances, etc.) • Local and/or regional connectivity for trails and sidewalks • Joint-use agreements between schools and public parks/ recreation areas • Public parks and open space set-asides or level of service targets • Smoke-free public spaces • Snow removal on sidewalks and/or trails • Streetscape elements as amenities for pedestrians and bicyclists (e.g., shade trees, benches, bicycle racks, trash receptacles, etc.) • Transit accessibility for all users 	<p>The following projects and programs, initiated by local governments as well as supporting organizations, also help enhance opportunities for active living:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bicycle boulevards or separated bicycle routes • Bike share programs • Crosswalk improvement and/or other pedestrian/bicycle safety projects • Guaranteed ride-home programs for bicycle or transit commuters • Improving play and recreation spaces in traditional areas (e.g., parks) and nontraditional areas (e.g., alleys) • Infrastructure for bicycle commuters (e.g., lockers, and showers) • Police patrolling on foot, bicycle, or Segway • Recreation and fitness programs • Safe Routes to School/Safe Routes for Seniors programs and improvement projects • Safe/evening walking escort services • Trail expansion/extension projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LiveWell Commerce City is working to engage residents in programs and policies that support physical activity, such as conducting walkability assessments, and providing culturally appropriate opportunities for outdoor education for low-income residents with Wonderful Outdoor World Colorado (WOW).³⁶ • The Colorado Department of Transportation Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan establishes goals, criteria, and performance measures to enhance safety, increase bicycling and walking activity, expand recreational opportunities, improve public health, and integrate the statewide plan with regional transportation plans.³⁷ • The HEAL (Healthy Eating and Active Living) Cities and Towns Campaign is a partnership between LiveWell Colorado and the Colorado Municipal League that provides training and technical assistance to help municipal officials adopt policies that improve access to physical activity and healthy food in their communities.³⁸ • In 2013, Longmont adopted supplemental policies and strategies to support healthy living in its comprehensive plan.³⁹

³⁶ LiveWell Commerce City. <http://livewellcolorado.org/healthy-communities/communities/commerce-city/strategies-16> . Accessed March 4, 2014.

³⁷ Colorado Department of Transportation Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. http://www.coloradodot.info/programs/bikeped/Bike_Ped_Plan/BikePedStatePlan/view . Accessed March 4, 2014.

Best Practice Approaches and Examples		
POLICY & REGULATORY APPROACHES	PROJECTS & PROGRAMS	EXAMPLES WITHIN THE DRCOG REGION
FOOD SYSTEMS AND NUTRITION		
<p>To make it easier for residents to access healthy, affordable food options, communities have developed policies and regulations to address many of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture and edible landscaping on public lands • Community gardens and community supported agriculture (CSA) programs • Farmers’ markets and produce stands • Farmland/agricultural land preservation • Food-producing animals (e.g., hens, goats, bees, etc.) • Individual gardens and composting (including front and backyard gardens, greenhouses, and hoop houses) • Government procurement programs and vending policies • Location of food retailers (including grocery stores, specialty stores, convenience stores, restaurants, and drive-through establishments) in relation to neighborhoods and/or needs • Mobile food vendors (i.e., food trucks) 	<p>Communities and other partner organizations are also focusing on the following projects, programs, and other efforts to enhance nutrition and access to healthy and affordable food:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buy local campaigns and farmers’ markets (including those that accept Supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP) benefits) • Commissary kitchens for small-scale food processing and development of value-added food products • Food banks and pantries • Fresh food retailer recruitment and financing programs • Neighborhood, community and school gardens • Nutrition education and cooking programs • Obesity prevention task forces, coalitions, or partnerships • Soup kitchens and pay-what-you-can food establishments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The City of Wheat Ridge has updated its zoning regulations and municipal code to support a range of urban agricultural activities, including growing and selling produce and keeping animals such as bees and chickens.⁴⁰ • Adams County’s Comprehensive Plan includes policies that support the conservation of agricultural lands for local food production purposes.⁴¹ These issues are also being addressed as part of the County’s Welby Subarea Plan and the Federal Boulevard Framework Plan based on information assembled as part of Health Impact Assessments prepared for both areas. • The Colorado Fresh Food Financing Fund (CO4F) finances grocery stores and other forms of healthy food retail in underserved communities throughout the state.⁴² • Denver Urban Gardens’ LiveWell initiative consists of a series of garden-based strategies designed to promote healthy lifestyles in the Baker, La Alma/Lincoln Park, and Sun Valley neighborhoods.⁴³ • The City of Arvada recently adopted an Urban Agriculture Ordinance to allow various forms of urban agriculture in throughout the City.⁴⁴

³⁸ HEAL Cities and Towns Campaign of Colorado. <http://livewellcolorado.org/healthy-policy/heal-cities-and-towns>. Accessed March 4, 2014.

³⁹ http://www.ci.longmont.co.us/planning/lacp/documents/signed_ord_2013_24.pdf. Accessed April 3, 2014.

⁴⁰ City of Wheat Ridge, Urban Agriculture. <http://www.ci.wheatridge.co.us/index.aspx?NID=985>. Accessed March 4, 2014.

Best Practice Approaches and Examples		
POLICY & REGULATORY APPROACHES	PROJECTS & PROGRAMS	EXAMPLES WITHIN THE DRCOG REGION
LAND USES & DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS		
<p>To encourage land use and development patterns that positively shape health and wellness, communities have adopted policies and regulations to address the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cluster/conservation development • Compact/walkable blocks • Infill and redevelopment • Form-based codes • Home occupations • Mix of housing types • Mixed-use development • Park, open space, and recreation land-set asides and levels of service • Parking maximums • Permitting accessory dwelling units (ADUs) • Roadway connectivity • Transit-oriented development • Tree protection/preservation programs • Urban growth boundaries/areas 	<p>The following projects, programs, and other initiatives have been initiated by communities and partner organizations to enhance health and wellness through land uses and development patterns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Fix-it first” capital improvement programs • Historic preservation and main street revitalization programs • Land conservation programs (e.g., open space programs, transfer of development rights programs, farmland preservation programs) • Neighborhood, corridor, and activity center retrofitting plans, projects, and revitalization programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tri-County Health Department’s Framework for a Comprehensive Plan includes draft policy language for communities and addresses land use, transportation, housing, parks, trails, open space, community facilities, water, and other topics related to community planning and development.⁴⁵ • The Colorado Health Foundation, in partnership with the Urban Land Institute, has sponsored the Healthy Places initiative, which helps Colorado communities become healthier places by focusing on the built environment.⁴⁶ • Recommendations to promote HEAL through the built environment were incorporated in the City of Thornton’s Health Impact Assessment of the South Thornton Revitalization Subarea Plan⁴⁷

⁴¹ Imagine Adams County Comprehensive Plan, 2012. <http://www.adcogov.org/DocumentCenter/View/2785>. Accessed March 4, 2014.

⁴² Colorado Fresh Food Financing Fund. <http://www.chfainfo.com/co4f/>. Accessed March 4, 2014.

⁴³ Denver Urban Gardens. <http://livewellcolorado.org/healthy-communities/communities/denver-urban-gardens>. Accessed March 4, 2014.

⁴⁴ City of Arvada Urban Agriculture Ordinance. http://static.arvada.org/docs/Community_Agriculture_Guide_2012-1-201211271038.pdf. Accessed April 3, 2014.

⁴⁵ Framework for Creating a Healthy Comprehensive Plan, Tri County Health Department. http://www.tchd.org/pdfs/framework_for_creating_a_healthy_comprehensive_plan.pdf. Accessed March 4, 2014.

⁴⁶ Healthy Places: Designing and Active Colorado. <http://www.coloradohealth.org/healthyplaces.aspx>. Accessed March 4, 2014.

⁴⁷ City of Thornton’s Health Impact Assessment of the South Thornton Revitalization Subarea Plan. http://www.cityofthornton.net/Departments/CityDevelopment/LongRangePlanning/Documents/Final%20HIA%20report%204_10_12%20with%20Reso.pdf. Accessed April 3, 2014.

Conclusion

Colorado's population is among the leanest and healthiest in the country and people are drawn to the state because of the opportunities it provides for them to lead healthy lifestyles. Yet, issues such as a growing health divide, land use and transportation patterns, existing and emerging development patterns, and a changing health care delivery system are presenting major health and wellness challenges to the state and region. In response to these challenges, many efforts are already underway to address and improve community health and wellness, but it remains a topic of growing interest and need.

With the effort to update Metro Vision underway, DRCOG has the opportunity to build on this momentum, and to define a clear vision for health and wellness not just for local communities, but the entire region. Other regions across the nation are already prioritizing health and wellness as key components and priorities of their plans for the future, and many stakeholders have noted that Metro Vision 2040 should reflect the progress to-date, and that it should also be bold and deliberate in its discussion of community health and wellness to reinforce the region's commitment to healthy living and quality of life.

To address this growing interest and need, Metro Vision 2040 could include upfront discussion of the importance of health and wellness in the region, and might also clarify why it is a topic of regional importance, and how it relates to economic, land use, transportation, environmental, and other regional issues. Metro Vision 2040 could also integrate references to community health and wellness throughout the plan elements and policies, and consideration could be given to a new, standalone chapter that addresses community health and wellness directly.

In addition to increasing the role of health and wellness in Metro Vision 2040, DRCOG might consider making a commitment to provide regional health and wellness leadership through its actions and decision-making, and could convene regional stakeholders to discuss trends, issues, and strategies related to health and wellness. Finally, DRCOG could pursue the development of a toolkit that supports and recognizes communities in their efforts to address and improve health and wellness. The toolkit could first emphasize education and training opportunities, and clearly identify pathways for local communities to enhance health and wellness. Other components of the toolkit to be developed could include a central portal of information for health indicators, partners, and model regulations, and a means to recognize exemplary efforts and achievements in community health and wellness.