

Ebel: Health in All Policies - improving the health of all people

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(Photo: Submitted photo)

Studies have shown that social and environmental factors, called "Social Determinants of Health," have twice the impact on a person's risk of premature death compared to the quality of their health care system.

These Social Determinants of Health include economic stability, neighborhood and physical environment, education, access to healthy food, and community and social supports. So even though health insurance reform has been at the center of political and public debate in recent months, there are other determinants of health beyond health care that impact our health.

The Licking County Health Department, along with other national, state, and local public health groups, is advocating for our local and state governments to adopt Health in All Policies initiatives. Often, routine policy and regulatory decisions related to things like housing, transportation, safety, parks, playgrounds, walkability, education, and employment are adopted by local and state governments without viewing them through a public health impact lens.

Health in All Policies is a collaborative approach to improving the health of all people by incorporating health considerations into decision-making across all policy areas.

Improved health outcomes and health equity can be achieved through collaboration between public health practitioners and nontraditional partners who have influence over the programs and policies that influence the Social Determinants of Health.

Some examples of Health in All Policies in action are coordinating street and sewer repair projects to review the need for sidewalks in the area that could be part of the paving work, or considering the health impact of placing a new school building in an area where children cannot safely walk to school.

Healthy community planning can make it easier for people to live healthy lives. Health in All Policies efforts allow communities to address chronic disease, walkability, safe routes to schools, and other health priorities that overlap with transportation, parks, land use, food systems and agriculture, community safety, and more. The Licking County Health Department is eager to work with local political subdivisions and other entities interested in incorporating health into their decision-making process to produce win-win policies that address local needs while contributing to healthier communities. For more information on Health in All Policies visit the American Public Health Association website at www.apha.org/hiap (<http://www.apha.org/hiap>).

Submitted by Licking County Health Commissioner, Joe Ebel, R.S., M.S., M.B.A.

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