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## Exploring the Contributions of Local Health Departments in Land Use and Transportation Policy: Implications for Cross-sector Collaboration

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## Background

- Popular media, professional societies and government agencies endorse active transportation.
- Transportation and land use policies impact the built environment and can promote physical activity.
- Community- & street-scale urban design and land use policies are effective approaches.
- Land use and zoning policy decision-making involves planners, transportation/public works, & non-health departments.
- Local health departments (LHD) are encouraged to participate in transportation and land use decision-making, but it is outside their expertise.
- A need exists for **cross-sector collaboration**, given LHDs limited resources and staffing constraints.

## Themes

### Physical activity & health perspective (n=44)



- Emphasize built environment impacts on health
- Broaden appeal and importance of transportation and land use discussions
- Incorporate transportation and land use goals into existing priorities

*"...having a public health perspective broadens the conversation and I've found it's gotten people to take notice. When we first started to do community engagement, we didn't get a lot of people when we were talking about brownfields in a technical way. When we shifted the conversation to talk about public health...people got more interested and that group probably grew from five people to thirty..."* (Planner)

### Knowledge of evidence base & best practices (n=23)



- Provide evidence base/best practices supporting health impacts of active transportation

*"...if it's their voice at the table that's saying: 'this project will have these benefits', I think that carries a lot more weight than if it's an engineer or even a planner saying: 'here's what we think the benefits are.'"* (Transportation/public works)

### Health equity (n=8)



- Draw attention to the negative impact of land use and transportation decisions on vulnerable populations

*"...we can contribute by bringing the voices to the table that aren't often represented in the political process. And, you know, if they can't be engaged, at least being a proxy for those....the needs of those tacit users..."* (Health)

### Resource Support (n=28)



- Identify, write, and secure grants
- Sources of small grants, technical assistance or testimony.

*"The opportunity to leverage funding is always a benefit. I know whenever we apply for grant funding they're looking for local commitment, local match or in-kind investment...when you have multiple agencies working together, limited resources are able to be expanded..."* (Other)

### Data & assessment (n=41)



- Access to local datasets, collect qualitative community-level data, analyze and collaborate on health data & assessments
- Identify needs, prioritize needs, describe utilization and demonstrate policy impact

*"A lot of this is based on political will, as far as the direction that we go in, and if there's information out there that the health department can provide that would show, or more substantiate the benefit and utilization of these types of facilities, the more information we have, the more data we have, it helps us when we're trying to prioritize..."* (Transportation/public works)

## Research Questions

1. What is the perceived value of LHD participation in built environment decision-making among practitioners in relevant sectors?
- 2a. What are the perceived unique contributions of LHDs?
- 2b. How can LHDs assist other departments in meeting shared goals

## Methods

- Individual semi-structured telephone interviews
- Purposive & snowball sampling
  - Sample identified through PAPRN+ & other colleagues
  - Experience with public health in transportation & land use processes
- Thematic Analysis conducted by 2 analysts
  - Interrater reliability 91%

## Sample

- Total of 49 respondents
- Representing 13 U.S. States

Disciplines	n (%)
Public Health	19 (39)
Land use planning	13 (27)
Transportation/public works	11 (22)
Other (Advocacy & Administration)	6 (12)

### Public education or involvement (n=27)



- Engage public to enhance public support and involvement in built environment projects via education on health benefits
- Cultivate engagement through community meetings, effective communication, and development of trust

*"They could really help with that public education piece in terms of pointing out why certain land use or certain transportation actions or focuses are so important from a public health standpoint. That's something that planners and to an even greater degree engineers aren't particularly good at, but public health officials could more effectively make that argument..."* (Planner)

### Partnerships (n=35)



- Build relationships with diverse group of partners (e.g. community members, advocacy groups, academia, external and departments)

*"Working with public health gave transportation advocates a whole different set of leverage points and relationships with not just public health people, but people in a community that were being served by the public health agencies, who we wouldn't normally interact with in our somewhat closed transportation world...it really expanded the universe of people and groups that I was able to work with..."* (Other)

## Strengths

- First study of perceived LHD value
- High interrater agreement
- Large rich data source

## Limitations

- Sample is non-representative due to non-random sampling methods

## Public Health Implications

- Themes mirror core public health values, capabilities, and functions promulgated by national public health leaders.
- Themes align with Public Health 3.0.
- Identification of content areas and skill sets where LHDs can leverage their strengths to foster cross-sector collaborations.
- Inform development of sustainable capacity building strategies to increase skills, infrastructure and resources for LHD involvement in built environment decision-making to achieve active community environments.
- Current work includes engaging an expert panel and conducting a nationally representative survey of LHDs to develop standards of involvement/capabilities.