Center for Urban Health: Enhancing the health of cities by focusing on communities and the environment

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Abstract

Urban sustainability is a new philosophy of developing healthy, productive communities that (1) promote and use locally-produced foods and products, (2) ensure safe access to natural spaces, and (3) establish low-carbon transportation systems. Urban living is arguably the most sustainable form of community given the concentration of resources, protection of arable land, and vertical structure of housing. In fact, urbanization is becoming the global norm; the percentage of global population living in urban settings has increased from less than 30% in 1950 to 47% in 2000; the percentage of urban dwellers is expected to increase to 60% by 2025. The promise of a healthy and sustainable urban future is clouded, however, by the reality of environmental insults, economic disparities, and behavioral pressures that exist in modern cities. The challenge is not how to build a shiny carbon-neutral city from scratch, but rather how to transition our current urban state toward one that is healthier, has less environmental impact, and is more prepared to respond and adjust to variety of environmental, social, and health changes in the future.

Several groups at IUPUI and int eh community are collaborating to explore connections between environment, behavior, health, and climate as related to urban environments. These translational efforts are inter- and trans-disciplinary, as evidenced by earth scientists publishing with pediatricians, and geographers publishing with epidemiologists. These efforts are largely undertaken with a geospatial and geotemporal research template. This template allows environmental, health, and behavioral data to be collected individually but with reference to space and time, which become important metadata components for analysis.

The Center for Urban Health promotes discovery by building research collaborations among Center Investigators, providing seed funds for new research areas, funding graduate fellowships, and sponsoring educational activities such as public lectures and a Visiting Scholars Program.