



Illinois Park District Adopts a Health and Wellness Policy to Support Staff and Community Residents

Illinois State Physical Activity and Nutrition Program Success Story

AT-A-GLANCE

Health and wellness policies provide a mechanism for organizations to formalize their support for the health of their staff and clients. Through the Illinois State Physical Activity and Nutrition (ISPAN) Program, the Illinois Public Health Institute and Tazewell County Health Department worked with the Pekin Park District in Central Illinois to adopt a comprehensive health and wellness policy. The policy aligns with the park district's mission to improve quality of life for the district's residents by focusing on nutrition, physical activity, local purchasing and sustainability.

(Image: Pavilion on the Lagoon at Mineral Springs Park. Provided by the Pekin Park District)



PUBLIC HEALTH CHALLENGE

The majority of residents in the Peoria, Tazewell and Woodford County (Tri-County) region do not get the recommended amounts of fruits, vegetables or physical activity, and have overweight or obesity.¹ Inadequate physical activity and poor nutrition are both risk factors for common chronic diseases including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers.² The 2019 Community Health Needs Assessment for the Tri-County region reports 66.1% of Tazewell resident were overweight or obese in 2009.¹ 56% of respondents indicated they exercise two or fewer times per week, and 23% of respondents reported no exercise.¹ 60% of respondents reported no or low consumption of fruits and vegetables per day.¹ Research has shown that a healthy diet and adequate physical activity can decrease the risk for related chronic health conditions, and improve mental and physical well-being.²

APPROACH

Through the ISPAN Program, the Tazewell County Health Department (TCHD) identified the Pekin Park District as a key community organization to develop and implement a health and wellness policy. Park districts provide an avenue for residents to engage in physical activity, access food, learn, and connect with family, friends and their communities. Research has shown that parks have a host of benefits including for chronic disease prevention and management, and for mental and emotional wellbeing.^{3,4,5} The Illinois Public Health Institute (IPHI) and TCHD worked with the Pekin Park District's Executive Director to develop a tailored health and wellness policy that aligned with the mission and values of the park district. The policy focuses on nutrition, physical activity, local purchasing and sustainability, and includes ways to educate, monitor and communicate the implementation of these policies to staff and the public. The Pekin Park Board of Commissioners adopted the policy on April 8th, 2021 and staff were trained shortly after.



ISPAN is made possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in collaboration with the Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity, administered by the Illinois Public Health Institute





The Pekin Park District decided to develop a health and wellness policy because it meets our mission of improving the quality of life for the district's residents. This too would include our employees who provide the health and wellness opportunities to our residents. Working with the IPHI and TCHD through the development of this policy has been a wonderful and educational experience. It would not have come to fruition without their expertise and assistance.

-Cameron Bettin, Executive Director, Pekin Park District



Impact

A collaborative approach with the local health department and park district leadership that valued health and wellness were key to policy adoption and implementation. IPHI and TCHD met regularly with the Pekin Park District Executive Director to draft the health and wellness policy. The policy includes providing foods that promote nutrition and reflect national guidance, offering physical activity opportunities for employees and residents, purchasing from local businesses when possible, and promoting sustainable initiatives at facilities. Pekin Park District includes over 2,200 acres, 17 parks, a water park, golf courses, and more, serving more than 161,000 people in the area. The park district has seven departments and programs that will work to implement all or sections of the policy. A departmental implementation worksheet was created to help each department execute the new organizational-wide policy.

WHAT'S NEXT

IPHI and TCHD are continuing to work with the park district on policy implementation. A SNAP-Educator from the University of Illinois Extension has joined as a technical assistance provider to help with implementation. Each technical assistance partner will work with two or more departments to complete their worksheet. The worksheet goes through each of the five policy sections and facilitates the creation of goals and action plans to help with implementation. Partners will continue to identify and work with additional organizations and park districts interested in developing their own health and wellness policy.

ABOUT ISPAN

ISPAN is a five-year, \$4.6 million initiative to implement physical activity and nutrition interventions designed to make it easier for Illinoisans to live the healthiest lives possible, especially in low-income, rural, and communities of color that have been the hardest hit by chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes and heart disease. With funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Illinois Public Health Institute is collaborating with the Illinois Department of Public Health, local health departments in three regions of the state, and a unified coalition of organizations from multiple sectors to tackle the root causes of obesity.

CONTACT

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¹ Partnership for a Healthy Community. (2019) Community Health Needs Assessment. Retrieved from https://www.osfhealthcare.org/media/filer_public/44/7f/447f7fc5-5986-41b4-aae3-0e639e14e620/2019_chna_peoria.pdf

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021) Adult Obesity Causes & Consequences. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/adult/causes.html>

³ Illinois Association of Park Districts. (n.d) Health and Wellness. Retrieved from: <https://www.ilparks.org/page/HealthandWellness>

⁴ National Recreation and Park Association. (n.d) Parks and Chronic Disease Management. Retrieved from <https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/b0fb4bb1c2b04c5abaa68e4a769740c5/parks-chronic-disease-management.pdf>

⁵ National Recreation and Park Association. (n.d) Parks and Improved Mental Health and Quality of Life. Retrieved from <https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/9c491783f73a45f89abb0443b1a3e977/parks-improved-mental-health-quality-life.pdf>