

Comprehensive Plans

A guide to improving health in RAMSEY COUNTY



The purpose of this guide is to help planners include health in the development of comprehensive plans and in future planning.

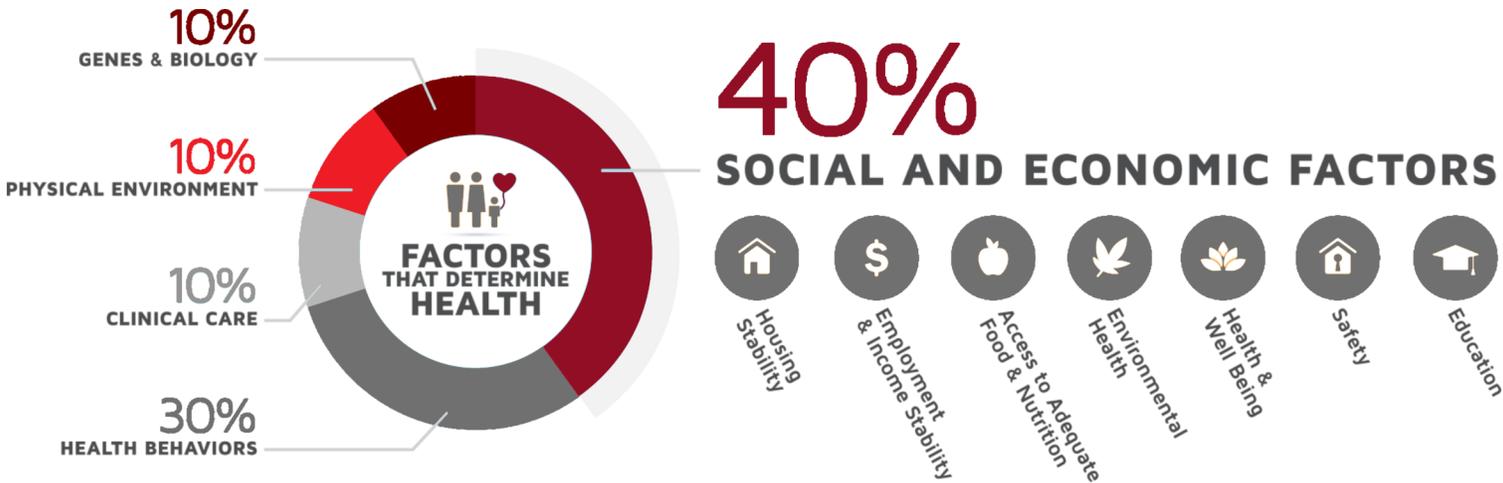
COMMUNITIES and HEALTH

Communities can support health when they increase opportunities for regular physical activity, access to healthy food and decrease tobacco use and exposure.

The social, economic and physical conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age strongly influences the health of individuals. Similarly, the health and vitality of a community depends on that of its people.

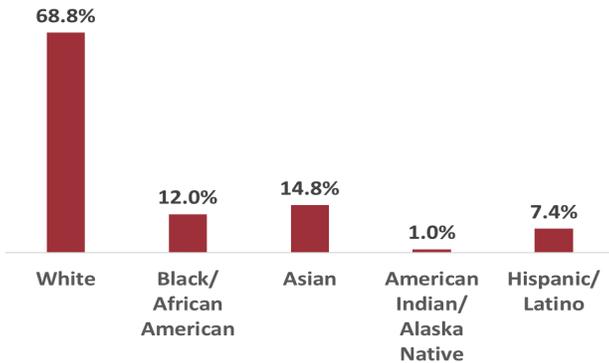
Examples of these conditions include safe and affordable housing, access to quality education and employment, access to healthy foods, safe places to be physically active and active transport, community and social support and environments free of toxins. These conditions interact to increase or decrease risk for major diseases such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, some forms of cancer, and ultimately life expectancy. The built environment can contribute to many of the problems but planning with health in mind can provide solutions to improving health. A community’s comprehensive plan can be a powerful tool in shaping up to 50% of these conditions that promote health (40% of social and economic factors and 10% physical environment, see below).¹

Factors that Determine Health^{1,2}



POPULATION and HEALTH STATISTICS

2016 Race & Ethnicity in Ramsey County³



Poverty



In 2015, 16.5% of Ramsey County residents, and 25% of children under 18 years of age lived in poverty.⁴

Aging Population



The 65+ population in the Twin Cities will more than double from 2010 to 2030; 1 in 5 residents will be 65 or older.⁵

Enrollment in SNAP & WIC



14.6% of Ramsey County residents received SNAP in May 2017.⁶ An average of 18,500 low income families used WIC monthly in 2016 to increase their ability to buy healthy foods.⁷

Physical Activity



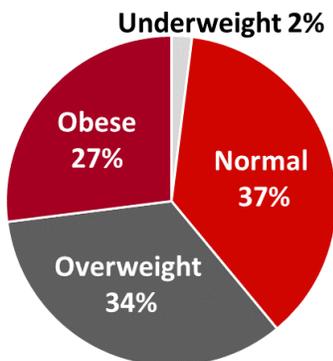
About 60% of Ramsey County adults meet physical activity guidelines of 150 minutes or more of moderate physical activity each week.⁸

Smoking

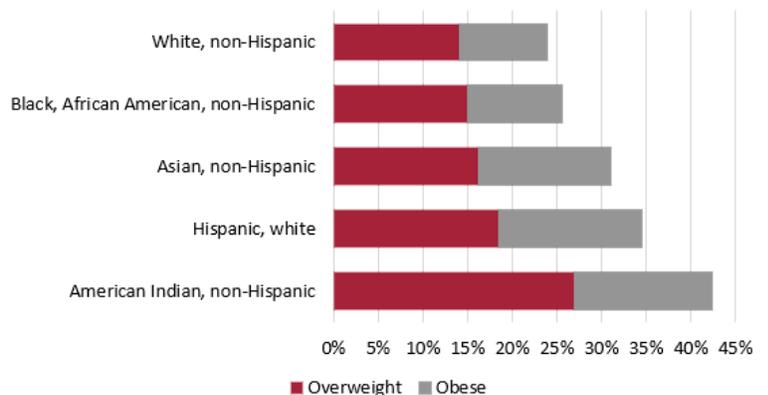


18.3% of Ramsey County 11th graders used any type of tobacco in the last 30 days, including e-cigarettes and hookah.⁹

Weight Status of Ramsey County Adults⁸



2016 Weight Status of Low Income Children (2-5 yrs) in Ramsey County¹⁰



EQUITY in YOUR PLAN

Where you live matters to your health. Disparities in health are related to structural drivers such as inequitable distribution of power and resources, and community conditions that create unhealthy environments and trauma. Research has shown that access to good schools, health care, healthy food, and the ability to be active are all essential to good health. Populations at highest risk for chronic disease include older adults, people of color, people with low incomes, and people with less education. Additionally, people who have poor diet, limited access to healthy food, physical inactivity, and those who smoke or are exposed to secondhand smoke have the highest risk of chronic disease.

In Minnesota overall, people of color historically have had lower incomes, education levels and fewer opportunities to achieve optimal health and well-being. In addition to personal impact, these conditions have an impact economically and can cost millions of dollars in health care expenses, lost wages and productivity. Planners can work to address health inequities by being aware of their causes. Intentionally focusing resources and planning through policy, systems and environmental changes in communities with poorest health outcomes can address health disparities and promote a healthier Ramsey County overall.

Community Engagement

Community engagement affords people an opportunity to identify their needs, create solutions and influence their environment.

- Intentionally and authentically engage community members in the planning process, especially those who have previously not been engaged.
- Be aware of who you have and haven't heard from. Reach out to community members and offer multiple, convenient, and accessible ways for meaningful participation. The approach may vary depending on the community you are aiming to reach.
- Build relationships with community members, especially groups most impacted by disparities, and include them in the decision-making process.
- Engage the community about barriers to health and include them in solutions.
- Include the public and health professionals in defining priority health issues.



Goal: Work to achieve health equity by providing opportunities for all people to attain the highest level of health.



Resources for Community Engagement

[Inclusive Outreach and Public Engagement Guide](#)

[Community Involvement Plan for Comprehensive Plan, Portland, Oregon \(an example\)](#)

[Ramsey County-Wide Pedestrian & Bicycle Plan: Community Engagement Report](#)

HOUSING and HEALTH



RAMSEY COUNTY HOUSING STATISTICS

- ⇒ In 2016, 5.3% of 11th graders said they have stayed in a shelter or somewhere not intended as a place to live in the last 12 months.⁹
- ⇒ 16% of adults smoke.¹¹ People who live in multi-unit housing are more likely to smoke and use other tobacco products than those living in single-family homes, thereby increasing secondhand smoke exposure.¹²

Goal: We encourage housing that supports active living.

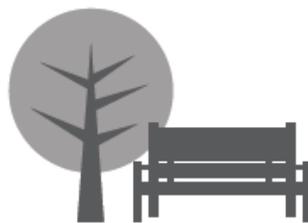
Housing goals in comprehensive plans can support health by offering a broad range of housing options to address different needs across income levels and life stages.

Homes provide more than shelter; they provide a sense of safety, comfort, and community. Healthy, safe, stable, and affordable housing contributes to individual and family health and a desirable, attractive community. Affordable housing can improve health outcomes by freeing up family resources for nutritious food, transportation, and health care expenditures. Local bike paths, sidewalks, mass transit all increase opportunities for active living and access to employment, schools, grocery stores and other amenities. Smoke free housing protects people from health risks related to second hand smoke exposure.

Housing Policy Recommendations

Active Living

- Encourage single-family subdivisions and multi-family development models that incorporate parks, trails, and sidewalks.
- Encourage multi-family development in mixed-use areas to encourage walkability to services.
- Support Transit-Oriented Development: housing with walkable streets, transit options, and easy access to goods and services.
- Support housing models that combine ground floor retail space with housing above for walkable communities.
- Support the development of housing that links work, transit, healthy food, and recreational opportunities.
- Encourage the development of market rate housing for residents age 55 and older, and strive to locate it in close proximity to health care facilities, grocery stores, and other services.



Let's follow Rosa and Gerald as they explore their healthy community. We will start at their home, which is affordable, safe, and located near nutritious food and healthcare services.

Housing Policy Recommendations (continued)

Healthy Food Access

- Support practices that integrate healthy food in residential settings.
- Partner with others to foster gardening practices (including soil testing for contamination) and a local gardening culture.
- Revise local regulations as needed to maintain flexibility for garden locations and support backyard composting.
- Encourage single-family subdivisions and multi-family development models that incorporate community gardens.
- Integrate community gardens into public housing development and create incentives for community gardens in affordable housing developments that receive public assistance.
- Encourage edible and pollinator-friendly landscapes on residential properties.
- Support a diversity of efforts to make fresh food and healthy meals available at multi-family properties.
- Expand options for keeping bees, chickens, goats, and other animals as appropriate for the size and location of the property, along with accessory structures they require.
- Build and encourage partnerships that work to expand residential access to healthy food.
- Explore the development potential for market rate multi-unit buildings containing mini-units that are designed to draw upon larger common areas and kitchen spaces to accommodate individual needs.
- Restrict the proximity of fast food chains near residential areas.
- Increase the proximity of food markets to residential areas.



Goal: We will increase food production and access to healthy food and meals in residential settings.



Housing Policy Recommendations (continued)

Equity

- Develop rental assistance programs and incentives for integrated development and mixed income communities to mitigate concentrations of poverty and consequent poor health.
- Support the [Elderly Waiver Program](#) to allow older adults to stay in their home.
- Offer tax incentives for new affordable housing for mixed ages or older adults.
- Institute home modification and repair programs and loan funds.
- Update zoning codes to encourage the development of a full range of housing options including rental apartments, condominiums, single level or accessory dwelling units, independent and assisted living.
- Encourage and incentivize universal design in new housing.
- Create partnerships with housing and service providers.
- Integrate mixed land use (housing, commercial and retail uses, and public services) to create more housing options, walkability, and shorten distances.
- Limit fast food chains in areas with concentrated poverty or schools.
- Utilize [CDC's strategies to minimize adverse effects of gentrification](#).
- Limit the density of liquor stores in areas with concentrated poverty or schools.

Healthy Environment

- Include educational information and resources on smoke-free housing for renters and property owners/managers on city websites, social media, and other communication channels. Include smoke-free housing information with licensing paperwork for owners.
- Provide incentives, such as reduced licensing fees or reduced fines for violations, for smoke-free buildings.
- Amend city ordinances to include secondhand smoke intrusion into multi-unit residences as a nuisance.
- Require property owners to disclose to potential renters or prospective buyers the smoking policy for the building, complex, and unit, whether smoking is permitted or prohibited.
- Adopt an ordinance to require that newly developed or all multi-unit residential buildings have a smoke-free policy.

Goal: We will offer affordable housing options for all residents at all stages of life.



Goal: We will establish healthy, safe communities by supporting the development, preservation and rehabilitation of housing that protects residents from exposure to harmful substances and environments, including secondhand tobacco smoke.

PARKS and HEALTH



City policies that address access to parks, park programs, park maintenance practices, and park policies are all guided in a city's comprehensive plan.

Parks can enhance health and help prevent chronic disease by promoting active living, increasing access to healthy foods, and providing tobacco-free environments. Enjoying green space and nature improves mental health and reduces stress.

RAMSEY COUNTY PARK STATISTICS

- ⇒ On average, Ramsey County neighborhoods have 1.8 parks located within 0.5 miles.¹³
- ⇒ 70.9% of people usually exercise somewhere outdoors like a park or trail.¹⁴

Parks Policy Recommendations

Active Living

- Ensure convenient access to parks, recreational facilities and programs.
- Locate parks within a half-mile of all residents with sidewalks leading to the park.
- Support programming that promotes active living within the park system.
- Provide high quality, diverse recreation program offerings for all ages.
- Ensure public safety in parks.
- Connect neighborhoods to parks with trails, bikeways and sidewalks.
- Require that the siting, design and funding of parks and open spaces be an integral feature of the development process.

Goal: We will create a park, trail and open space system that provides for recreation and leisure needs of all residents and supports non-motorized transportation.



Rosa and Gerald took a short walk to their neighborhood park. Their grandchildren can play at this safe and tobacco-free environment while Rosa and Gerald enjoy nature and reduce stress.

Parks Policy Recommendations (continued)

Healthy Food Access

- Review and update regulations governing community gardens and fruit-bearing shrubs and trees in city and county parks to foster an expansion of healthy food production in the community.
- Provide park land for community gardens and farmers markets.
- Provide healthy choices in concessions and vending machines.
- Encourage edible and pollinator-friendly landscapes on park property.

Equity

- Increase program locations to provide access to recreation programs within a half mile of low mobility residents (young, old, and those without vehicles).
- Evaluate parks for universal accessibility, including adequate park benches and restrooms, and make needed improvements.
- Illustrate the community's history from diverse perspectives in parks.
- Remove cultural barriers to participation by involving residents in the design and planning process, actively recruiting minority residents and recent immigrants as volunteers and interns, establishing a park liaisons program, reducing language barriers, and more actively marketing activities and events.
- Ensure access to financial programs for all by providing low and no cost options, sliding scale fees, tiered pricing scholarships, and subsidized rentals.

Healthy Environment

- Adopt a comprehensive tobacco-free parks ordinance that outlines the rationale, locations and products covered and an enforcement mechanism to protect visitors from secondhand smoke and accidental ingestion of litter by children and animals.
- Demonstrate and encourage healthy choices by offering nutritious foods in park vending and at events, emphasizing local food where possible.
- Locate community gardens within a city's park system.
- Improve and expand community education programs about nutrition and food preparation.
- Incorporate healthy food options into festivals and events.

Goal: We will support the establishment and maintenance of community gardens throughout the community to provide residents with easy access to healthy food.

Goal: We will ensure equitable and affordable access to parks and recreation opportunities.

Goal: We will encourage healthy choices in our park by offering nutritious foods at park events.

TRANSPORTATION and HEALTH



Collaborate with authorities who have the ability to restrict residential speed limits to 20 mph. There is a much greater risk of death when a pedestrian is hit by a car moving faster than 20 mph.⁸

Transportation connects people to employment, education, housing, healthy food, places to be physically active, friends, and family. Access to these essentials can decrease risk for major chronic diseases. Communities that have the physical infrastructure and programs to promote active transportation, like walking and bicycling, tend to have more physically active and healthier populations.

RAMSEY COUNTY TRANSPORTATION STATISTICS

- ⇒ 13.9% of people living ≤200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines (FPG) consider their neighborhood not very pleasant or not pleasant at all to walk, as opposed to 4.5% living at or above 200% of the FPG.⁸
- ⇒ 15.9% adults say that problems with transportation sometimes, often or always keeps them from grocery shopping as much as they would like.¹⁴
- ⇒ 15.9% of residents said barriers to transportation keeps them from the grocery store always, often, or sometimes.¹⁴

Transportation Policy Recommendations

Active Living

- Utilize the [Ramsey County All Abilities Transportation Network](#).
- Develop a bicycle/pedestrian plan.
- Develop Safe Routes to School plans.
- Establish a local Active Living Advisory Committee or join the [Active Living Ramsey Communities](#) group.
- Improve the environment by thinking of pedestrians and cyclists first with lighting, wayfinding signs, and traffic calming measures.
- Establish a process to incorporate active living issues into the land-use review and planning processes.
- Implement a city trail system plan.
- Keep pedestrian routes free from crime by keeping them lit and clean.
- Ensure pedestrians and bicyclists are safe when crossing streets.



Rosa and Gerald live near a bus stop which takes them to the local grocery store. Safe bicycle paths in the community allows their grandchildren to bike to Rosa and Gerald's house for daily visits.

Transportation Policy Recommendations (continued)

Healthy Food Access

- Support transit service improvements to better connect people to commercial areas with healthy food sources.
- Review local policies to reduce or eliminate any impediments to the use of taxi and car-sharing services.
- Encourage car-sharing and bike-sharing accommodations in multi-family developments.
- Collaborate with regional economic development agencies on efforts to improve food distribution infrastructures.
- Undertake a systematic assessment of the bicycle and pedestrian routes that connect consumers to healthy food sources, and address deficiencies through physical improvements to bicycle and pedestrian networks.
- Adopt site standards for food stores that provide safe and convenient pedestrian access to the front door and bicycle parking.
- Use the All Abilities Transportation Network to specifically highlight the importance of multi-modal connections to food resources and food retail.
- Pursue opportunities to add specially equipped, grocery-friendly transit service that operates on weekends and off-peak hours and connects directly to stores selling healthy food and farmers markets.

Goal: We will improve the flexibility, mobility, and affordability in connecting people to healthy food.



Equity

- Support innovative practices such as mobile food shelves and mobile food markets that can bring food closer to under-resourced customers.
- Prioritize transit service and bike/walk infrastructure in populated areas with low vehicle ownership and low access to healthy food and needed services. Link transit stops to destinations with pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure.
- Use a health impact assessment and connect with [Human Impact Partners](#) to inform and guide transportation policy, projects and planning.
- Fund programs that expand transportation options for disadvantaged populations and people with disabilities, and that promote safe, convenient transportation options for children and seniors.
- Ensure street lamp bulbs are replaced as needed in all neighborhoods.

Goal: We will use the [Ramsey County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan](#) to foster a complete, community-wide bicycle, pedestrian, and transit network.

Goal: We provide equitable transportation to connect people with opportunities.

LAND USE and HEALTH



Compact development patterns where people live closer to schools, employment, and retail support both active living and healthy food access and contribute to health. Limiting concentration of alcohol and tobacco retailers promotes safer communities and reduces smoking rates. A city's comprehensive plan guides the pattern, type, density, and characteristics of development and can influence the health of residents. Ensuring a balance of jobs and housing improves opportunities for living and working within the same community.

Land Use Policy Recommendations

Active Living

- Encourage and zone for higher-density or mixed-use housing near transit lines and commercial areas.
- Consider a minimum density requirement for new residential and mixed-use projects and other types of development.
- Locate schools near existing residential areas and other areas that support active living.
- Reduce the amount of unused land and parking areas surrounding commercial areas to encourage walkable development patterns; consider incentives for shared parking for complementary uses.
- Incorporate active living into the land-use review and the planning process.
- Focus infrastructure investment in the developed portion of town.
- Reduce lot sizes in new residential subdivisions.

RAMSEY COUNTY LAND USE STATISTICS

- ⇒ Only 55.6% of adults said there are fresh fruits and vegetables available for purchase with a half mile, or a 10-15-minute walk from their home.¹⁴
- ⇒ Only 36.5% of adults said they have a grocery store within one mile of their home.¹⁴
- ⇒ Consequently, 8.3% of adults get food from a convenience store or gas station one time a week or more.¹⁴
- ⇒ 40.1% of adults get food from a farmers market 2-3 times per month and 25.9% of households get food from a community garden or grown at home during the normal growing season.¹⁴

Goal: We will support strategies that encourage mixed uses and efficient design to encourage active living, and support healthy food-related businesses and activities.



Rosa and Gerald live near the local community center which allows them to walk to community activities. They also have access to a community garden that used to be an abandoned parking lot.

Land Use Policy Recommendations

Healthy Food Access

- Within the comprehensive plan, designate a land use category that allows for grocery stores or other healthy food retail within a half-mile of all residential areas.
- Develop a program to preserve remaining urban agricultural lands.
- Employ an approach to planning processes that treats health equity, healthy food access and food systems development as primary considerations when making major land use decisions.
- Cluster multi-family housing around areas well served by commercial goods and services including grocery stores and transit.
- Prepare a community food assessment to identify barriers to healthy food, income levels, community gardens, and farmers market availability within urbanized areas.
- Review and simplify or remove a city’s regulation of food and urban farm-related land uses in order to improve the variety and availability of healthy food outlets.
- Identify clean, vacant or under-utilized property suitable for community gardens and urban farming opportunities.
- Review and update regulations governing backyard gardening, community gardens, and urban farming to foster an expansion of food production in the community.
- Review and update regulations governing food processing businesses such as flash freezing and small-scale home and commercial kitchens to increase business growth.
- Review and update regulations concerning food outlets, such as grocery stores, small food stores, farmers markets, seasonal food stands, and farm trucks, to support growth in the types and number of food outlets throughout the community and their hours and locations.
- Promote the need for a choice of healthier meal options on restaurant menus.
- Consider a program to regulate the number of fast food establishments in the city.
- Restrict fast food development within 1/2 mile of schools.
- Limit the total number of fast food restaurants within neighborhoods by regulating restaurant density. Consider zoning requirements that fast food establishments cannot be within 1/2 mile of any existing restaurant.

Goal: We will support development patterns that preserve parks and decrease the distance between households and retail food options.



Goal: We will use land use regulations to improve local households’ proximity to healthy food and support healthy food-related businesses and activities.



49.5%

of Ramsey County residents say they have a fast food establishments within 1 mile of their home.¹⁴

Land Use Policy Recommendations (continued)

Equity

- Consider use of a Health Impact Assessment when considering large infrastructure changes that impact low-income residents. Historically, pollutants, contamination and noise are more likely to impact low in-come communities.

Goal: Support development efforts that ensure economic stability for all.

Healthy Environment

- Limit concentration of alcohol and tobacco retail businesses.
- Prohibit sales of alcohol or tobacco products within 1/4 mile of parks or schools.
- Restrict sampling of tobacco products (including e-cigarettes and hookah pipes).
- Restrict sales of flavored tobacco products. Use the ordinance in [Shoreview](#) as an example.



Goal: Reduce alcohol and tobacco use by restricting access, especially to youth.

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This document contains health data for Ramsey County. The information about healthy communities and policies to consider are for general use when developing comprehensive plans. Please contact us if you would like more assistance with including health in your city's comprehensive plan.

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