

## Stories from Hamilton's Action Neighbourhoods

The map above shows the boundaries of the 11 neighbourhoods part of the City of Hamilton Neighbourhood Action Strategy. Ten of these neighbourhoods have been developing long-range neighbourhood plans. Here are just four examples where neighbourhoods are integrating health into their planning activities.

Promoting healthy food networks is one of **Beasley's** many health-focussed goals and actions. They have plans to increase food security through the development of an outdoor community oven, continuing to promote Environment Hamilton's Good Food Box program, and establishing a new community garden.

The **Crown Point** neighbourhood has done a walkability study of their neighbourhood which has highlighted the "pipe line", a four km trail that bisects parts of the neighbourhood, as a neglected asset that could be improved with signage, lighting, paving and connections across busy streets. As part of their goal for a clean and green neighbourhood, Crown Point residents also want identify more locations that could access the existing free

City program to have trees planted on front lawns. Trees both enhance walkability and reduce air pollution.

Creating indoor and outdoor community spaces has been a major focus for residents in the **Keith** neighbourhood. A decade ago the neighbourhood moms' group organized support and advocated for the city to create the North Central Park and include a splash pad, park equipment and fencing. In 2004, Robert Land School closed and through fundraising and neighbourhood support the school was purchased and the Eva Rothwell Resource Centre was created. The Keith neighbourhood plan includes the inclusion of a green gym and increasing the assets in North Central Park so that sports teams can use the park. Public spaces like these are

vital for neighbourhoods to provide opportunities for residents to congregate, celebrate and engage in community life.

Community development has been a strong focus in **McQuesten** for the last decade, which has led to a number of successful projects around food, health services, safety and community engagement in the neighbourhood. Some the areas of focus for the new McQuesten neighbourhood plan include actions to increase relationships between neighbours and encourage more residents to participate in community activities. These types of community building initiatives help to improve health on a personal level through ways such as reducing isolation and stress and increasing residents' sense of control over their environment.

### Healthy neighbourhood budgeting

Resident-led neighbourhood planning could get another significant boost in Hamilton in the coming years through "participatory budgeting" initiatives. Participatory budgeting gives residents opportunities to give input into what local funds should be spent on, elect representatives to create a budget and then vote on the final decision. Councillors Brian McHattie (Ward 1) and Jason Farr (Ward 2) have recently agreed to use a form of participatory budgeting for local ward funds. In cities that already use participatory budgeting, positive health benefits have been seen due to increased investment in initiatives like the ones described in this report. **For more information about participatory budgeting in Hamilton please visit: [www.pbhamont.ca](http://www.pbhamont.ca)**

# 7+ ways your neighbourhood can improve your health

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**Healthy Communities Hamilton** is a steering committee chaired by the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton and with membership from Hamilton's Community Health Centres (Centre de santé communautaire Hamilton/Niagara, De dwa da dehs nye>s Aboriginal Health Centre, Hamilton Urban Core Community Health Centre, North Hamilton Community Health Centre), Health in the Hubs (McMaster School of Nursing) and the Healthy Living Division of Public Health Services (City of Hamilton).

**A neighbourhood can't build a hospital or find a cure for cancer.** While those are useful for healing the sick, they're not as useful preventing us from getting sick in the first place. Health care services are not the complete answer for better health.

**Improvements to our physical, social, economic, and cultural environment around us is the best recipe for better health.** Research has shows that these social determinants of health influence our health in more significant ways than genetics, lifestyle or behaviour alone.

**We have the capacity to build health at the neighbourhood level by looking at community**

**assets in different ways.** For example: parks are more than a place to have a picnic, they are health assets that provide opportunities for physical activity and for improving mental health through community engagement activities that build and strengthen relationships. Other health assets in neighbourhoods include sidewalks, bus stops and community centres, among many others.

The Neighbourhood Action Strategy currently led by the City of Hamilton with community partners is one specific opportunity to integrate a health lens into neighbourhood planning. **But as residents, we can all begin to take steps at any time to improve health in each of our neighbourhoods.**

## Create living wage communities

Income is one of the most important social determinants of health. Health status improves at each step up the income ladder, and the healthiest populations are those which have a more equitable distribution of wealth in their society.

**Living wage is a strategy to convince employers to improve the wages for their lowest paid workers. The health of low wage workers is particularly compromised due to the higher stress of having trouble making ends meet and the more limited choices they can make due to lack of income.** Living Wage Hamilton has calculated that \$14.95 is the wage necessary to live a decent standard of living in Hamilton and participate more fully in society.

Calgary's Living Wage Action Team has had success by focussing their efforts at the neighbourhood level. They will be recognizing "living wage communities" where at least half of the businesses and other employers in a neighbourhood pay a living wage.



## Create mentally healthy places and spaces

Mental health can be improved at a neighbourhood level in many ways:

### Community engagement is a stress reducer

Research has shown that the very act of community engagement leads to feelings of empowerment and reduced stress, which improves health at a personal level.

### Social inclusion combats stigmatization

Discrimination and stigma against people living in poverty, persons with disabilities, racialized and newcomer communities and other marginalized groups are an important contributor to depression and other mental illnesses. When different groups of people talk to each other greater social inclusion and shifting of attitudes can happen.

Making everyone feel welcome in community meetings and treating all residents with dignity and respect are actions that help increase self-esteem and reduce stigmatization.

### Strengthening relationships builds resiliency

Lack of social support networks is almost as important an influence on health as lack of income. The social networks that can develop through community activities help to build resiliency - the ability to manage and cope with adversity. A great way to build stronger social networks within a neighbourhood is the human connections that occur through conversations at community meetings and with neighbours.



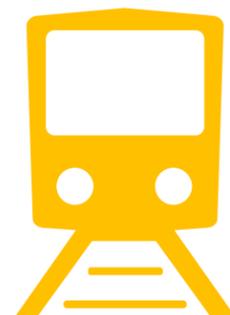
References for research cited in this report can be found at:

[www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca/equity-inclusion/health](http://www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca/equity-inclusion/health)

## Improve public transit and take the stress out of getting to work

With the ever-rising price of gas, an improved public transit network is a direct way cities can help residents increase their spending power. Better public transit allows more residents to put off buying a car or for families to get by with one car instead of two. **Reducing car use is also good health policy. Research tells us that the more minutes and hours people spend in cars the more health problems like high blood pressure and obesity they will encounter. Driving is the leading cause of some of Hamilton's deadliest air pollution, and improving public transit can lead to significant improvements in air quality.**

Hamilton is currently developing a plan to bring major rapid transit to Hamilton, including the possibility of Light Rail Transit that would serve all of Hamilton's Action Neighbourhoods. Neighbourhood planning can support the development of rapid transit by calling for rapid transit stops near their neighbourhood and improved feeder bus service to the main rapid transit line.



## Make it easier to eat a healthy diet

Economic and physical access to healthy food is not evenly distributed among Hamilton's neighbourhoods. Good Food Box programs, community gardens, food co-operatives and community kitchens are all ways to increase access to healthy food beyond the traditional focus on driving to a supermarket. **Less than half of all Hamiltonians across all income groups eat enough fruits and vegetables, so making fresh produce a bigger part of neighbourhood life can help everyone improve their health.**

Food-based activities, such as neighbourhood potlucks, outdoor community bake ovens are also great ways to involve a greater number of residents in community life.



## Make it more enjoyable to take a walk

The walkability of a neighbourhood includes the ease, safety, comfort and enjoyment of walking to local destinations.

**On a personal level, one of the simplest ways to improve health is to integrate half an hour of walking into everyday life.** The health benefits of walking are present for all ages. Walking to school is an important way to reduce childhood obesity. For older residents, the impacts of 30 minutes of walking a day can be as much as 50% decrease in the progression of dementia. The City of Hamilton is currently developing a pedestrian mobility master plan to increase walkability in neighbourhoods across the city.

The types of changes that can be made in a neighbourhood to increase walkability include traffic calming by planting more trees, turning one way into two way streets, and narrowing lanes by building curb bump-outs. Walking is also made easier when sidewalks are widened, benches are added, and sidewalks are ploughed in winter. When increased walkability leads to more people walking on a street, the benefits extend beyond personal health to personal safety, due to more eyes and ears on the streets.

## Make the bicycle an easy way to get around

**Improved cycling infrastructure has many health benefits for all residents in a neighbourhood, not just cyclists.** Bicycle lanes help pedestrians as they create a buffer between the sidewalk and car traffic, making walking more enjoyable. Bicycle lanes help to narrow streets and contribute to traffic calming, making walking safer. Bicycle lanes encourage more people to cycle for short trips, thus reducing local air pollution from unnecessary driving.

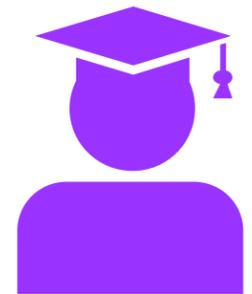
The City of Hamilton's cycling master plan has designated major streets in central Hamilton where bike lanes will be added: Cannon, Burlington, Gage, Victoria, Hunter. East of the Red Hill Valley, the plans designates streets such as Nash, Lake, Mount Albion, Barton and King for bike lanes. Major streets and roads in Ancaster, Binbrook, Dundas, Waterdown, Hamilton mountain, Stoney Creek and Winona are also included in the planned bike lane network.



## Reduce barriers for residents of all ages to complete high school and pursue options for post-secondary education

The benefits of completing high school and pursuing post-secondary education extend beyond extra earning potential, and has positive impacts on health as well.

Working with schools, colleges and universities, residents in neighbourhoods can make help make education more accessible by removing barriers to attendance, keeping kids engaged in school and welcoming mature students who want to upgrade their skills.



## Healthy neighbourhoods are inclusive neighbourhoods

Social inclusion is about generating the feeling and the reality of belonging. Neighbourhoods can have a big impact on residents' sense of belonging or sense of exclusion.

Actions to create healthy neighbourhoods, like the ones described in this report, can level the playing field by improving daily life for those who have often been socially excluded. For example, Aboriginals and racialized communities, women, or persons with disabilities are more likely to be public transit users, pedestrians, earning a low wage, or to be food insecure. Social inclusion also happens through strengthened relationships that result from community development.

One local initiative, the Hamilton Age-Friendly Collaborative, is working to make the city more accommodating for seniors in particular, but the impacts will improve life for all age groups. One of their focuses is walkability and they have studied eight neighbourhoods in Hamilton and what improvements could be made. Another related action they are focusing on is improving transportations options for people who don't drive, either by choice or circumstances.