

ISSUE REPORT

Investing In America's Health:

A STATE-BY-STATE LOOK AT PUBLIC HEALTH
FUNDING AND KEY HEALTH FACTS



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PREVENTION IN ACTION

Pitt County: Celebrating our Community and our Community's Wellness

By James Rhodes, Planning Director, Pitt County, North Carolina

People talk about prevention initiatives such as shared use policies and farmers markets as if they are new and maybe they are for them. However, that's not the case for Pitt County, as we have been, apparently, on the forefront of these initiatives for some time.

In 1978, the county created a shared use policy to open school sites for recreational and community activities. It quickly became how we were brought up.

I coach basketball and can easily secure a gym for practice. As a county citizen, I can reserve any facility as long as it isn't being used at that time for a school function. This goes way beyond gyms to include any fields, trails and most other grounds. In fact, most of our schools have trail systems that connect through the neighborhoods, which can be used for hiking, biking and running.

Quite simply, our community tries to get everything they can out of the land and it really does help people get physically active.

With the shared use policies, it's also been far easier to make additional investments in school facilities. Private individuals have paired with public funding to supplement what schools have — anything from infield dirt for a baseball diamond to additional resources for trails. The land serves all capacities — the school invests in it and the community invests in it.

More recently, we've extended the nature of shared use to parks. We even developed a centrally located district park that serves as a hub for the community — it is near schools, our greenhouse facilities, the animal shelter, our farmer's market, the recycling center and the senior's center.

We have been able to create connectivity between all activities — so instead of just dropping of recycling, residents also visit the market or take a hike around the connecting trails.

In fact, the farmer's market is right by one of the trails that is over a mile long and runs around the park. It is also adjacent to the community garden. When we planned to open the garden,



which is one and one quarter acres, we had a waiting list for folks that wanted their own plot of land. There was huge excitement and that has continued to this day. A resident who moved here from North Dakota was one of the first people in line for the community garden. She never expected the level of community camaraderie among the gardeners. She gets good exercise and grows healthy foods to serve her family. The gardeners come down to walk on the trail, meet a relative or neighbor — it has created a nice family and intergenerational atmosphere.

In addition, our senior center residents use the garden to help educate elementary school kids about gardening and kindergarten classes have lessons there. In fact, they had their own jambalaya cooking project at the height of the growing season. The kids really enjoyed themselves, but also were introduced to healthy vegetables and foods that are grown in their community.

We know we aren't perfect — we constantly need to work to help people stay healthy and happy, and, to that end, we've expanding our reach to corner stores in food deserts to market fruits and vegetables prominently.

For us, it all started with the shared use policy in 1978. Since then, the community has bought into a healthy lifestyle and we've been able to do more and more to help more and more people stay fit, active and productive.