

The importance of including multiple disciplines when developing indicators for the built environment

Built Environment Subgroup

Of the

APHEO Core Indicators
Work Group

Background

- The Ontario Public Health Standards require public health units in Ontario to work with municipalities to support healthy public policies and to create and enhance supportive environments in recreational settings and the built environment.
- A working group of the Association of Public Health Epidemiologists of Ontario (APHEO) has been developing indicators that can be used to measure and track the impact of the built environment on population health outcomes. This task, as part of the Core Indicator Project of APHEO, was renewed in January 2011.
- The working group consists of epidemiologists, municipal planners and health promoters.

Method

In order to select valid and measurable indicators of the built environment subgroup:

- Reviewed planning documents and environmental scans produced for this group by a consultant
- Reviewed available data sources
- Examined the different aspects of how the built environment would affect physical activity
- Selected indicators that appeared to be comprehensive and examined appropriate ways to measure them
- Work in small groups that include at least one epidemiologist and one subject matter expert and build the indicators

Findings

The need for cross-disciplinary partnership:

- The development of built environment indicators has benefited from the partnering of municipal planners and public health professionals.
- Each discipline has expertise that is specific to their area of practice, yet has equal value in describing and measuring the health impacts of the Built Environment
- Epidemiologists are specialists in measurement but we need to know what to measure.

- After adding a planner to our group, we are now engaged in discussions using different language and definitions that are foreign to us as an epidemiologist/public health yet are industry standards for planners.

Summary

- The built environment influences human behaviour in a complex manner
 - Design, density and diversity are important elements of the built environment
- We are developing Built Environment indicators at the
 - street,
 - neighbourhood
 - city
 - inter-city level.
- To ensure we develop indicators that will measure the impact of the built environment on health outcomes, we need to understand the