

## Investing in Health: Designing a Strong and Healthy New York through the Regional Economic Development Councils



### How linking health and economic development can reduce health care spending

The health of New York's economy, communities, and residents is inextricably linked. People living in low-income and distressed neighborhoods often experience poor health outcomes, and poor health and illness create an economic burden that affects individuals, companies, regions, and, ultimately, the entire state. New York State ranks second highest in the United States for medical expenditures attributable to obesity, spending \$11.1 billion (in 2009 dollars) each year.<sup>[1]</sup> Being physically active and eating healthy foods are two key variables that contribute to preventing obesity and other related chronic illnesses. Therefore, community and economic development that supports increased access to physical activity and healthy foods within all our communities is vital to addressing both the economic and physical health of NYS.

### NYAM shows that the New York State Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) initiative can impact health

The New York Academy of Medicine (NYAM) developed a report to show that there are clear opportunities to simultaneously enhance public health and economic development through the Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) funding process. In 2011, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and Lieutenant Governor Robert Duffy initiated a community-based approach to economic development by creating 10 REDCs charged with developing long-term plans for economic growth for their regions. NYAM identified a set of evidence-based and recommended strategies from national literature for promoting healthy eating and physical activity that can also promote economic development. The team then reviewed descriptions of the projects funded in 2012 and 2013 to identify which projects may positively impact healthy eating and physical activity in their local communities.

<sup>1</sup> "Focus Area 1: Reduce Obesity in Children and Adults," New York State Department of Health, accessed August 26, 2013, [http://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/prevention\\_agenda/2013-2017/plan/chronic\\_diseases/focus\\_area\\_1.htm](http://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/prevention_agenda/2013-2017/plan/chronic_diseases/focus_area_1.htm)

## A few examples of the great healthy eating and active living projects funded to date:

- Corbin Hill Farm in the Mohawk Valley received \$180,000 to construct a facility that will provide a location for local farmers to bring their products for packaging and distribution locally and to the Bronx and Harlem in NYC. <http://corbinhillfoodproject.org>
- NYC Department of Transportation received \$600,000 to partner with UPROSE to develop the Sunset Park Upland Connector, connecting Sunset Park to the waterfront. The project will improve the streetscape and establish pedestrian and bicycle connectivity to the Bush Terminal Piers Park and the Brooklyn Waterfront Greenway. Work will include community engagement, planning and design, sidewalk enhancements, green storm water infrastructure, landscaping, and pedestrian amenities. <http://uprose.org>
- The Albany County Rail Trail project received \$1,003,478 in the Capital Region to construct 5.5 miles of a proposed 9.3 mile shared-use path along a former rail bed. The final design and construction of the path are expected to improve mobility and economic opportunity for non-drivers, create a better option for commuting by walking or bicycling, reduce emissions and vehicle miles travelled, improve economic activity along the trail corridor, and improve health for trail users. <http://www.albanycounty.com/Government/Departments/CountyExecutive/RailTrail.aspx>

## Additional proven strategies for promoting healthy eating and physical activity that received REDC funding in 2012 and 2013 include the following:

- Incentivize production of healthy and locally grown products
- Support access to local and healthy food
- Develop activities that improve skills in purchasing and preparing food
- Create regional infrastructure for production, distribution, and processing of local foods for institutions
- Locate groceries and supermarkets in underserved communities
- Increase accessibility of outdoor spaces for physical activity and play for people with disabilities
- Create access to places for physical activity (combined with informational activities)
- Increase green space and parks
- Support smart growth (mixed use, transit-oriented development) and Livable Communities
- Improve streetscape design

## Key Report Findings

1. Out of the 725 projects awarded in 2012, there were 45 potentially health promoting projects, with 21 projects supporting healthy eating and 24 projects supporting physical activity. The 45 projects represent 2.2% of total funding (\$16 million of the total \$738 million).
2. The distribution of projects with potential to promote healthy eating and physical activity per region in 2012 ranges from just one in the Mohawk Valley region to 10 in the Capital Region. The dollars awarded for projects that have the potential to promote healthy eating and physical activity ranged from \$75,000 in Mohawk Valley to \$3.4 million in the Capital Region.
3. Out of the 824 projects that were awarded in 2013, there were 22 projects supporting healthy eating and 109 supporting physical activity. The 131 projects represented 7.4% of total funding (\$53 million of the total \$716 million).
4. The distribution of projects in 2013 ranged from seven in both the Mohawk Valley and NYC to 20 in the Capital Region. The dollars awarded for projects that have the potential to promote healthy eating and physical activity ranged from \$1.3 million in Mohawk Valley to \$11 million in the Capital Region.

## Acknowledgments

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## About NYAM

The New York Academy of Medicine advances the health of people in cities.

An independent organization since 1847, NYAM addresses the health challenges facing the world's urban populations through interdisciplinary approaches to policy leadership, innovative research, evaluation, education, and community engagement. Drawing on the expertise of our professional staff, diverse partners worldwide and more than 2,000 elected Fellows from across the professions, our current priorities are to create environments in cities that support healthy aging; to strengthen systems that prevent disease and promote the public's health; to eliminate health disparities; and to preserve and promote the heritage of medicine and public health.

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## About DASH-NY

The Designing a Strong and Healthy New York (DASH-NY) Obesity Prevention Coalition and Policy Center was launched through support from the New York State Department of Health in April 2010. DASH-NY is staffed by The New York Academy of Medicine (NYAM), located in East Harlem in New York City. The work of DASH-NY focuses on policy, systems, and environmental changes that will lead to equitable community environments where healthy eating, active living, and access to preventive health care services are a reality for all New Yorkers.

DASH-NY convenes partners from multiple sectors, such as transportation, agriculture, economic development, planning, education, academia, health care, and more, to develop sustainable, cross-cutting strategies for reducing the burden of obesity and chronic disease.

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