

Healthy Development Coordinators



Department of
Health



Public Health and Planning: Bridging the Divide

In 2017, the Tennessee Department of Health established seven regional positions to promote the development of healthy built environments across the state. These Healthy Development Coordinators (HDCs) serve as external-facing positions that engage in cross-sector collaboration to address the social and environmental determinants of health. Each HDC lives and works in one of the state's seven health regions, developing relationships and collaborating with a wide range of local stakeholders to prioritize health in decisions related to land use planning, transportation, housing, greenspace, food access, and economic development. The coordinators work primarily in the state's suburban and rural areas, including small cities and towns. The HDCs have a variety of backgrounds and expertise, including public health, urban and regional planning, and outdoor recreation. The Tennessee Department of Health's Office of Primary Prevention works alongside the Division of Community Health Services to provide ongoing training and support for the HDC positions. These unique and ground-breaking positions attracted over 400 applicants from 30 states when first created, and over the past four years have established healthy built environments as a core function of the Tennessee Department of Health's work.

Each HDC prioritizes projects to support in their region based on feedback from community partners. The types of work they engage in reflect both health department priorities and the needs of individual communities. Generally, all coordinators engage in the following activities:

Inform Local Officials on the Health Impacts of Projects and Planning Decisions

Sit on Local, Regional, and State Boards and Committees

Manage the Health Department's Access to Health Built Environment Grants

Participate in Local and Regional Planning Efforts

Inventory Built Environment Assets in Local Communities

Evaluate Built Environment Projects

Provide Health Data

Write Grant Proposals

Lead Design Charrettes



Land Use



Food Access



Economy



Greenspace



Active Transit



Housing

Accomplishments in 2020

155

Stakeholders engaged in collaborative projects

\$3.4m

External grant dollars awarded with assistance from HDCs

33

Presentations delivered at conferences and meetings

The Healthy Development Coordinators are an integral part of the Tennessee Department of Health's *Access to Health* built environment grant program. They help communities identify eligible projects, manage the grants, and assist with evaluation of the funded projects. In 2019-2020, the department awarded \$1.8 million in funding for projects in all 95 Tennessee counties. Those projects included **infrastructure**, **programming**, and **planning**.

118

Infrastructure projects built with *Access to Health* grant funding

10

Programs implemented with *Access to Health* grant funding

6

Community plans developed with *Access to Health* grant funding



Sara Cox



Ashley Davies



Kurt Heischmidt



Tim King



Rachel Swafford



Cameron Taylor



Kelly Ware

Case Studies

Health Expertise in Local Planning and Zoning Decisions

Kurt Heischmidt, MPH | *Upper Cumberland Region*

Since 2017, Kurt Heischmidt, the Healthy Development Coordinator in Tennessee's Upper Cumberland Region, has fostered relationships with the region's Development District and local officials. Thanks to Kurt's efforts, **health is now a regular topic discussed at local government meetings** regarding transportation and city planning. He provides expertise on how the built environment impacts the health of the community, and **direct technical assistance** on plans and zoning codes to incorporate healthy planning and development principles. Kurt attends the Development District's monthly strategy session meetings, serves as the **bike/ped representative** for both Rural Planning Organizations in his region, and serves on Clay County Government's **economic and community development advisory committee**. His work has been instrumental in giving public health a seat at the table in local planning and zoning decisions, and ensuring his region's policies and plans incorporate health into their development.

Fostering Relationships with Officials for Safe Routes to School

Sara Cox, MCRP | *Mid-Cumberland Region*

In 2019, Williamson County was awarded a \$20,000 Tennessee Department of Health *Access to Health* grant to help build a sidewalk near several elementary and middle schools in Nolensville, Tennessee. The region's Healthy Development Coordinator, Sara Cox, collaborated with the County Director and the County Commission to direct the funds to the sidewalk project to **ensure students could walk to school more safely**. The group worked alongside the Williamson County School District to **identify additional funding** to bring the project to fruition, and the county completed construction in time for the 2020-2021 school year. Sara is now working with the county to **evaluate the impact of the sidewalk** on changes to walkability and student safety.

Healthy Community Design Education for Local Health Councils

Kelly Ware, MPH, CHES | *South Central Region*

Each of Tennessee's 95 counties is represented by a County Health Council, a collaborative group comprised of professionals in a variety of sectors, including local government, social services, schools, housing, and healthcare. Healthy Development Coordinator Kelly Ware **participates in health council meetings** in her region, **delivering educational presentations** on healthy community design. These presentations educate council members on healthy design principles and interventions while **building relationships with other sectors** that directly influence health through their work. These presentations help to establish Kelly as an **expert and resource in her region** on greenspace, outdoor recreation, complete streets, building design, and food security, **spurring additional projects and opportunities** for cross-sector collaboration.

Case Studies

Programming to Increase Physical Activity and Safety for Students

Cameron Taylor, MCRP, AICP Candidate | *East Region*

The Tennessee Department of Health engaged an elementary school in an underserved Knoxville neighborhood to help address high rates of school absence. The neighborhood, marked by narrow streets, has no room to build sidewalks to provide students with safe routes to school. Many of the parents do not have access to cars, and the school is located just outside of a city bus route. In the fall of 2019, the East Region's Healthy Development Coordinator, Cameron Taylor, **drafted a plan** to collaborate with teachers and AmeriCorp Vista volunteers to **form a "Walking School Bus"** to guide students safely to school 4 days a week for a semester. Local non-profit Bike/Walk Knoxville provided reflective vests and stop signs for students, and volunteers met students each morning to walk them to school and **ensure their safety**. The program has **improved school attendance rates** while encouraging regular, **safe physical activity** for the students.

Creative Problem-Solving Leading to Opportunities for Placemaking

Tim King, MS | *West Region*

In the City of Selmer in McNairy County, a privately-owned apartment complex is home to a number of low-income families with children who lack a playground and safe opportunities for outdoor recreation in their neighborhood. Since the apartments are privately-owned, the property is ineligible for most grants to fund the purchasing and installation of new recreation facilities. The West Region's Healthy Development Coordinator, Tim King, **researched nearby property ownership** and discovered the property across the street belonged to the Boy Scouts of American and Lions Club. He reached out to the owners, explained the families' needs in the nearby apartments, and they agreed to donate the land to the City of Selmer. The city recently **received grant funding to build a playground and other recreation facilities** on the property. This project is one of several where Tim has helped **connect local communities with opportunities** for placemaking and outdoor recreation for children and families in his region.

Innovative Placemaking to Reduce Food Insecurity

Ashley Davies, MPH, CHES | *Northeast Region*

In 2018, Feeding America reported the food insecurity rate in Washington County as 11.5%, about 2% higher than the national rate. Ashley Davies, the Northeast Region's Healthy Development Coordinator, worked alongside the Washington County Health Department and East Tennessee State University's College of Public Health to **create four little food pantries**. They **coordinated with four local community partners** to place the pantries in communities that needed a supplementary food source. The pantries are painted and designed to look like small houses, creating **a sense of creativity and place** in their communities. Ashley **coordinates food donations and distribution** in her region to keep the pantries stocked with healthy foods.



On the Horizon

Prioritizing Projects

The HDCs are engaging stakeholders in their regions to develop a list of built environment projects that communities see as their greatest needs. These projects are weighted on several factors, including feasibility, cost, community support, potential to impact health, and equity. These project lists will help the HDCs prioritize which built environment projects in their respective regions to support through technical assistance, grant writing, or facilitation, as well as connecting projects to funding opportunities as they arise. The project prioritization process ensures a proactive and stakeholder-driven approach to building healthy communities.

Developing Trainings

In partnership with the Tennessee Department of Health's Office of Primary Prevention, the HDCs are collaborating with the Indiana Department of Health and the Virginia Walkability Action Institute to learn about walkable communities and how to implement complete streets policies, particularly in rural areas. In the coming months, they will use this knowledge to develop their own training programs and policy templates to educate and assist communities in their regions in creating safer, more walkable communities.

Presenting Their Work

The HDCs regularly present their work to educate partners, share successes, and build relationships that can help foster healthy built environments throughout the State. In fall 2021, they will present at the Tennessee Public Health Association Conference, the Rural Health Association 2021 Annual Conference, and the Tennessee Bike Walk Summit.

For more information about the Healthy Development Coordinators please visit tn.gov/builtenvironment or contact Shannon Velasquez at Shannon.Velasquez@tn.gov