

# New Haven Public Health Department

## VISIONS OF A HEALTHIER NEW HAVEN

### *Executive Summary of Survey Responses*

\*Full report can be accessed at [www.healthmattersnh.org](http://www.healthmattersnh.org)\*



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## Introduction

During the spring of 2010, the New Haven Health Department’s Health Equity Alliance (HEA) Director Shanta L. Evans and the City of New Haven’s Community Services Administrator (CSA), Dr. Chisara N. Asomugha, began to engage staff from other municipal departments in conversations on the concept of “social determinants of health”. The NH-HEA site also sought to bring this discussion to the New Haven community as a way to reshape the way people think about health (i.e. beyond just individuals, to include external factors such as living conditions and community safety), and to encourage a wide array of community participation, from local politicians to community residents and youth. Inspired by previous efforts in New Haven, the *Visions of a Healthier New Haven* campaign interviewed the New Haven community—gathering the authentic voices of *New Haveners*--to inform the important work of creating a healthier city. Responses were collected via video-recorded interviews and the *Visions of a Healthier New Haven* survey. The survey, created jointly by the New Haven Health Department’s Health Equity Alliance (HEA), Health Matters! Working Group, DataHaven and the Yale-Griffin Prevention Research Center (YGPRC) and designed with resources from the New Haven Health Department, asked two open ended questions: “What is your vision for a healthier New Haven?” and “How do we build it?”

## Results

### Sample

A total of 823 surveys were collected, of which 73 (9%) were electronically submitted and 158 (19%) came from other community locations (e.g., public libraries, restaurants, senior centers and local stores). Five hundred and ninety-two (72%) surveys were collected from high schools locations. A total of 29 (4%) surveys were collected from Spanish-speaking residents and translated to English using Microsoft WORD translate and incorporated in the overall summary. Table 1 provides a summary of the survey responses by collection site.

**Table 1. Survey Collection Sites**

Location	#	%
High Schools	592	72
Other Community Locations	158	19
Internet	73	9
Total	823	100

### Themes

Based on the survey responses, a total of 6 themes were identified. The most widely identified themes were ‘Environmental Health’ (69%), ‘Community Safety’ (56%) and ‘Improved Health’ (27%). Table 2 provides a summary of the themes identified.

**Table 2. Overall Summary of Themes**

Theme	#	%
Environmental Health	568	69
Community Safety	501	61
Nutritional Health	222	27
General Health	206	25
Improved Health	193	24
Improved Transportation	133	16

When stratified by data collection site, **high school location respondents** most identified the theme “Environmental Health” (80%), which was followed by “Community Safety” (61%) and “Nutritional Health” (28%). With respect to the themes from the surveys collected from **locations in the community**, “Community Safety” (62%) was the most

prominent, followed by “General Health” (40%) and “Environmental Health” (37%). **Internet survey respondents** cited the theme “Improved Transportation” (86%) the most, followed by “General Health” (66%) and “Nutritional Health” (60%).

**Table 3. Themes Summarized by Collection Site**

Theme	High School (n=592)		Community (n=158)		Internet (n=73)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Environmental Health	475	80	59	37	34	47
Community Safety	360	61	98	62	43	59
Nutritional Health	168	28	10	6	44	60
General Health	95	16	63	40	95	66
Improved Health	121	20	34	22	38	52
Improved Transportation	44	7	26	17	63	86

### Understanding the Elements of the Vision

Through the analysis of the themes and subcategories, generalizations were formed based on the most common responses and used to answer the two survey questions posed.

#### “What is your vision for a healthier New Haven?”

Survey respondents’ vision of a healthy New Haven is a city that:

- Is safe from gun violence related to crime, gang and illegal drug activity.
- Has affordable places to live with a supportive infrastructure for walking to work and school, and accommodates physical activity.
- Is clean, and recycles.
- Has schools that prepare children for the future.
- Has job opportunities and job training.
- Has neighborhood homes and buildings that are not in disrepair.
- Has accessible grocery stores and restaurants that offer nutritious food.
- Whose residents are healthy people who eat well and are active.

#### “How do we build it?”

Survey respondents cited the need for a “renewed sense of community in New Haven” as the foundation for building a healthier city. To achieve this, many stated a need to combat crime via an increased police presence, gun control and by addressing the problems associated with illegal drugs in the community. Others focused on the needs of young people—that a healthier New Haven requires outlets for physical activity (parks, athletic teams) and programs that are of interest to them and will help them navigate successful futures.

*“They should make several skate parks in New Haven because there’s a lot of skaters and ‘BMXers’ around here. So if you build more skate parks it would probably help kids stay out of trouble and we will have something to do all day.”*  
 -High School Location Respondent

Survey respondents articulated the necessity of accessible transportation systems in building a healthier New Haven, such as improving the infrastructure through clean roads, sidewalks to encourage walking and more pedestrian-friendly street designs. Many identified the need to accommodate bicycle use in the city with improved bike lanes and safe storage for bicycles at commonly-frequented locations. In addition, a need for improved and efficient municipal transit service was suggested.

*“A healthier New Haven would be one in which:*

- 1. Our roads and sidewalks are safe for all citizens -- bicyclists, rollerbladers, joggers, walkers, people pushing baby carriages and of course, drivers. This could be achieved by enforcement of existing traffic laws, including laws prohibiting harassment of others on the road (tailgating, aggressive driving, etc.) and smarter street design in order to encourage traffic to move at a more humane pace.*
- 2. Safe neighborhoods in which citizens look out for one another and do not tolerate "funny business" in their midst. Responsive police can help with this, and police who keep their ears to the ground and their feet pounding the pavement.*
- 3. Greater food security and elimination of serious curtailing of current incentives that make a healthy lifestyle the more difficult choice. Farmer's markets, sure, but people can't survive on some farmers carting food down to New Haven for a few months a year. We need better access to grocery stores, whether that's a mobile grocery store that comes on a van and brings fresh produce to different neighborhoods a different day each week, or something even more innovative, we need to get out to where the people are and bring the healthy food to them. Other healthy lifestyle options need to be encouraged, like walking, other forms of exercise, but we can't do that without numbers 1 and 2 above!*
- 4. No more whining. Different advocacy groups in the city fight against one another, effectively eliminating the possibility for real change. Let's show the country we are better than politics at large and the way things have been running in this country. Incremental change has its benefits, but we all need to stand up and realize that some things are just a good idea, and don't be afraid that it's going to take power away from vested interests. Do what's right ...”*

*-Internet Survey Respondent*

Availability of jobs and access to health care were also cited as necessary building blocks in creating a healthier New Haven. Respondents suggested that this could be achieved through job training as well as continuing to improve New Haven schools. Further, health care access could be improved by providing more support for neighborhood health clinics.

*“A place where everyone can achieve their ultimate goals and dreams with an affordable place to live, living wage, health care, healthy family and support.”*

*-Community Survey Respondent*

To make New Haven look cleaner, survey respondents cited a need for more recycling in the city and more effective garbage clean-up and management. Air and water pollution were also a concern and many focused on the need to improve the air quality with respect to available transportation in the city. Respondents also suggested that improving the physical structure of buildings and existing homes in neighborhoods would also support this vision.

*“No garbage around the sidewalk and street, but recycle and help the world make it look better.”*

*-Internet Survey Respondent*

Lastly, to achieve a vision of a healthy New Haven the residents of the city need to be healthy. The overwhelming number of methods suggested to achieve this goal included improved nutrition and increased physical activity. Some respondents suggested focusing on increased access to nutritious food in grocery stores, farmer's markets, restaurants and community gardens. Moreover, increased physical activity would be supported through improvements to the city's infrastructure, enhancing and expanding city parks and increasing the availability of gyms in neighborhoods. In addition, to be healthier, respondents recognized the need to have available programs to help people quit smoking and drugs; and to make alcohol and tobacco less available in local stores.

*“Building a healthier New Haven...may take a large change but it is very possible. The government can promote healthier restaurants and start making healthier food choices cheaper. Healthier food needs to be accessible and our citizens need to be aware. Advertisements need to promote change in fitness and health, persuading viewers to change their eating habits. More trees need to be grown because that helps everything (oxygen).”*

*-High School Location Respondent*

*“Less cigarette smoking. Educational campaign combined with extremely high taxes on cigarettes. Less air particulate matter. Solve the traffic problems at the highway intersection; less idling.”*

*-High School Respondent*

*“A healthier New Haven is full of recreational opportunities and availability to fresh, healthy food. There are parks and gardens everywhere. Pedestrians, cyclists, skateboarders and other non-motorized vehicles are adequately provided for, not discouraged. A healthier New Haven de-emphasizes motor vehicle activity which has been proven to cause unhealthy conditions such as air and noise pollution, physical injuries and fatalities from driver negligence, and increased stress levels for residents. A healthier New Haven has an ample supply of fresh food from local farms being complimented by neighborhood gardens and urban farms. This provides increased physical activity through gardening (or learning to garden) and an improved diet for most residents due to an increase in fresh vegetables. Children are educated about what it takes to be healthy. Knowledge about diet and exercise shall be fundamental lessons taught at an early age and continued through adulthood. Parks shall be prevalent. Residents in all neighborhoods should have a walking destination for recreation. Community activity is emphasized especially that which centers around healthy food and physical activity.”*

*-Internet Survey Respondent*

## **Conclusion & Next Steps**

These collected stories from New Haven community members provide another dimension to our understanding of how to build a healthier city. Additional information through the Health Equity Alliance is being collected and will be combined with this survey's data and reported on in information briefs that will focus on obesity prevention, community safety and smoking cessation in New Haven. The findings of this survey will be shared with community partners within the context of the work of the New Haven Health Department and its partners, in an effort to make city-wide recommendations specific to these issues.

It should also be noted that many of the survey respondents' suggestions are already underway in New Haven, including recycling programs, world-class nutrition programs in the schools (Chefs Move to Schools™), complete streets design implementation, Safe Routes to Schools, and Streets Smarts™, Healthy Heroes™ and many more. Nevertheless, the responses from New Haveners underscore the need for all sectors to work together in building and supporting a healthier New Haven.

Insights gathered from this campaign and a short video documentary will be shared at the **Visioning a Healthier New Haven Conference taking place on Thursday, January 27, 2011.**