

HEAL ZONES

Highlights from the Resident Leader Learning Community



HEAL Zones help transform communities by increasing opportunities for engaging in healthy behaviors. Kaiser Permanente and Community Partners facilitated a Network Leaders Learning Circle, and a Resident Learning Community on July 31 through August 1, 2015. This document shares highlights from the Resident Leader Learning Circle that focused on leadership and civic engagement.

Policy Change for Healthy Communities

The annual convening celebrated HEAL Zone resident leaders success in catalyzing healthy communities. The Resident Leader Learning Community focused on how to influence policy change in cities.

Resident leaders help transform communities by becoming influencers and organizing to create healthy places where families and neighborhoods can thrive. Resident leaders have the right to advocate for developing, implementing and monitoring HEAL Zone friendly policies. We can also shape change by educating our families and neighbors about healthy behaviors and choices, and by voting and encouraging others to vote to elect public representatives that value public health.



It is important for resident leaders to get engaged with their local city council. Christy Weir (Council Member, City of Ventura) said, "Show up at your council meeting and speak. Council meetings are often broadcast on television and you might reach a lot of people with your message." City councils can leverage funds to





help make the city a healthier place to live, work, or go to school. For example, HEAL Zone funds can help support fitness equipment in parks, flashing lights on crosswalks, paved sidewalks, and markets with fresh fruits and vegetables. The City of Ventura has a health chapter called “Our Healthy City” which includes a health vision in the city’s general plan. Including language about health in the city general plan makes it easier for residents to advocate and achieve healthy policy changes.



Leadership, Power, and Participation

Dr. América Bracho, CEO of the Latino Health Access (LHA) spoke with resident leaders about three big ideas: power, leadership, and participation. “Leadership expresses a vision,” she said. “What do we want for our communities and how can we make our dreams a reality?” Leadership begins with knowing your community. We develop a local vision by inviting people to express what they think, value, and want. We can liberate our dreams by thinking for ourselves, defining our own visions, and inspiring others to lead.



It is powerful to express your positive vision for your community. We can use our power to achieve good things for our neighborhoods. Find your own power. Express your dreams. Share your dreams with others. Get involved. “We can change things by participating,” Dr. Bracho said. “We could win political changes in our schools. We could feel better about ourselves. We could win unity. We could do great things together.”



“The essence of community work is building relationships,” said Dr. Bracho. All relationships begin with an invitation. We build relationships by being good neighbors. Our neighborhoods make a big difference in health outcomes. “The place where you live determines how long you will live,” said Dr. Bracho. Environmental health risks include more than just access to a clinic or hospital. Health conditions include quality housing, healthy schools, safety, access to a healthy diet, mobility choices like walking and biking, and access to clinical care. “Individual change is not sufficient. We need to change the living conditions for our communities,” she said.



Being a powerful leader requires expressing your vision with your voice. Politicians make decisions that have an impact on the places we live, but they listen to whoever speaks the loudest. We can organize our voices to be heard and create change.

When we advocate for healthy options in our neighborhood we build



our communal power to create change. Dr. Bracho told a story about how there were no parks for children to play in the neighborhood, so people began to comment at city council meetings to ask for a local park. Mothers spoke out about the health of their children and the environment. They were successful building a beautiful and safe public park in the neighborhood. “They didn’t just build a park,” she said. “They built a community.” Now residents learned how to use policy to get things done. They learned how to work with the city council, understand land use, and make the community a better place.



Participate in the City

At the gathering, Judy Harper facilitated a “Talk Show” with three city officials and city staff: the Honorable Jennifer Mendoza (Council Member, City of Lemon Grove), Honorable Rex Richardson (Council Member, City of Long Beach), and Joe Perez (Community Services Superintendent, City of Anaheim). They discussed tangible ways to advocate for HEAL Zones through civic engagement. They encouraged everyone to get involved. Rex Richardson said, “Civic engagement creates a thirst for more civic engagement.” Mendoza, Richardson, and Perez said that resident voices matter.



“Programs and services are progress, but policy is power. Change begins when your voice is heard by people who make decisions in your area.”

*Joe Perez
City of Anaheim*

Be clear. Be loud. Be persistent. Get to know your city council members and let them get to know you and your community. Attend city council meetings and speak on topics you care about. “Stay on point. Don’t be afraid,” said Mendoza. Here is how it’s done: 1) Think about the issues you care about, 2) Prepare your ideas to speak for 3 minutes, 3) Attend the council meeting, 4) Get a speaker slip and sign up. Extra Tip: Find out if there is a Resident Leadership Academy in your area. Joining can help newcomers get prepared for civic engagement.

Rex Richardson said that the Long Beach City Council is now a HEAL City, and it aligned with the First Lady Michelle Obama’s Let’s Move campaign. When a city council adopts an official HEAL City resolution it makes it easier for residents to advocate for healthy changes in their neighborhoods because it is a part of the city’s official vision.



HEAL Zone leaders asked insightful questions of the city council members. One resident leader asked the panel why cities don’t make it easier for single parents to participate by providing childcare during council meetings. Roberto, a teen resident leader from Lemon Grove, asked how youth can get their opinions heard by city councils. The panel said they have seen youth organize for better recreation facilities and spaces to skateboard safely. Youth can mobilize their friends to get involved, join a local Youth Residents’ Council, or ask to start one.



“Organize your friends, said Council Member Richardson. “Go meet with councilmembers. It might seem intimidating, but with practice you will become more confident.”

Introduce yourself to your city representatives and staff. Learn about their goals, and let them know your vision for a healthy city. Get to know your city council members and staff so you can talk with them about your ideas. Invite elected officials to your community events so they can see what you do and learn what you care about. Residents can work with elected officials, the city manager, or city planners to improve conditions in their neighborhoods. If your elected representative does not speak for you, vote to get someone else into office that cares. If you can't vote because you are undocumented, or you have a past felony, you can still organize to get people into office that represent your interests. By getting involved in local policy change, we can work together to increase opportunities for healthy eating and active living in our neighborhoods.



“Now we know we can advance by completing projects. I have rights as a resident. We might not have papers, but we have our voices. I can achieve solutions.”

*Lucy Ortiz
Resident Leader*

“Go to your city council meetings. You have the right to speak on anything.”

*Hon. Jennifer Mendoza
City of Lemon Grove*



“You have power. You have a voice. You are prepared. You know what the policies are. You can talk with the school principal. If the principal says no, you can say yes. You can because we want it.”

*Vera Washington
Resident Leader*



“You don't know how powerful your voice is. When people march in to a council meeting, you are heard.”

*Hon. Rex Richardson
City of Long Beach*