

Local Policy Agenda

From the California Department of Public Health Nutrition & Physical Activity Branch

Contents

Introduction	3
The Importance of City- & County-Level Policy Change for Health Promotion	4
LHD Roles in PSE Change	6
Policies	8
Land Use & Zoning	9
<i>Limits on Unhealthy Food Retailer Density</i>	10
<i>Green Space</i>	20
<i>Food Sales Overlay Zones, Permits, & Regulations</i>	25
<i>Heat Planning</i>	32
<i>Environmental Justice Elements in California General Plans</i>	39
Active Transportation	45
<i>Complete Streets</i>	46
<i>Vision Zero</i>	52
<i>Other Active Transportation Funding Programs</i>	59

Food Retail Environment	64
<i>Healthy Checkout</i>	65
<i>Sugar-Sweetened Beverage (SSB) Taxes</i>	73
Healthy Procurement	83
<i>Local Healthy Procurement & Unhealthy Food & Beverage Sales Bans</i>	85
<i>Values-Based Procurement</i>	91
<i>Local Wellness Plans & Policies</i>	96
<i>Sugar-Sweetened Beverage (SSB) Sales Bans</i>	101
School Food	106
<i>School Meals</i>	106

Introduction

Vision

Local health departments (LHD), working in partnership with other local government agencies and community organizations, are essential advocates for community-level policy changes that support healthy eating and active living. By leading policy, systems, and environment (PSE) change efforts, LHDs help shape community conditions that make healthy choices easier and more accessible for all Californians.

Background

Local policies play a crucial role in shaping food and physical activity environments and in influencing population-level health outcomes. Decisions made at the local level, such as those related to land use, transportation, food retail, and procurement, directly affect access to healthy food, opportunities for physical activity, and exposure to conditions that contribute to chronic disease and health inequities. The *Local Policy Agenda* is part of a broader set of resources developed by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) Nutrition and Physical Activity Branch (NPAB) and ChangeLab Solutions that aim to support LHDs in identifying and advancing high-impact, community-level policy solutions. There is also a corresponding [Local Policy Agenda Table](#) with additional information. See the full suite of resources: [Nutrition & Physical Activity Policy Resources for State & Local Health Departments & Community Partners](#).

Purpose

The *Local Policy Agenda* is a practical resource for LHDs and their partners across local government and community settings. It is intended to support LHDs in advancing community-level policies that promote healthy eating, active living, and chronic disease prevention, whether by initiating new efforts or by strengthening existing policies through implementation and enforcement. This policy agenda provides:

- **A menu of data-informed, timely, and reasonable policies for LHDs and their partners to consider**
- **Key steps to develop, codify, and implement these policies**
- **Roles LHDs and their partners can play in undertaking this work**

- **Ways to engage and empower communities throughout the policy process**
- **Information on potential legal considerations for California jurisdictions, as well as anticipated challenges**

Rationale

The policies included in this agenda were selected because they reflect areas in which local jurisdictions typically have authority or influence, demonstrate evidence of effectiveness, and offer meaningful opportunities to address health inequities. Selection considerations included potential reach, strength of evidence, feasibility, alignment with community priorities, and relevance to disproportionately affected populations. This agenda is designed to help LHDs prioritize strategic engagement by providing internal guidance on advancing policy priorities with the greatest potential impact and tools to support local coordination.

The Importance of City- & County-Level Policy Change for Health Promotion

Many policies that address community conditions to improve public health can be pursued at the local level. Local policies at the city and county level can work synergistically with state policies, often going above and beyond them to meet the distinct needs and leverage the unique assets of their communities. Still, jurisdictions need to consider any state or federal preemption when developing local policies to ensure they align with state and federal requirements.

For example, land use and zoning, local taxing decisions, and other local retail regulations and laws that affect community health fall under the purview of city and county governments. City councils, planning commissions, county boards, and planning and zoning departments make decisions about sidewalk width and connectivity, where and how parks can be built, the separation or mixing of land uses (e.g., housing and food retail), and Complete Streets design – all of which can support or discourage active living and healthy eating. Departments of finance, along with city councils and county boards, make decisions about budget and the implementation of local taxes, through which funds can be directed to support active living and healthy eating programs and goals. LHDs also often regulate food vending and concession spaces, which are integral components of the food system that affect dietary choices.

In certain circumstances, states can and have enacted statewide land use and zoning legislation and taxes to require development for the greater good or to support priority populations. This is because NIMBYism (the “Not In My Backyard” sentiment) has a greater influence on local politics, and state laws often provide a cover for local officials to enact land use and zoning policies that support health without fear of public backlash.

Understanding Legal Authority & Preemption for Local Governments in California

LHDs and other local government entities have varying degrees of legal authority to advance public health and safety. Understanding this legal authority is essential to knowing what actions local jurisdictions can take to improve the health of their communities.

Preemption is when a higher level of government limits or eliminates a lower level’s power to pass a law on a particular issue. Depending on how it is used, preemption can have both positive or negative effects. LHDs often work with local legislative bodies to enact policy changes. They must be aware of preemption-related issues in their state so they can make informed decisions about how to best direct their activities to improve public health. See [**ChangeLab Solutions’ guide for more information on legal authority and preemption**](#) related to policies that address the social determinants of health, or [**ChangeLab Solutions’ primer for information on legal issues specific to school policies**](#).

In California, **general law cities** derive their legal authority from state statutes and must follow statewide laws, even in matters of local governance, whereas **charter cities**, authorized by the California Constitution, have greater autonomy over municipal affairs, allowing their local laws to supersede state law within city limits. This constitutional “home rule” gives charter cities expanded control over local matters such as elections, land use, and contracting, subject to limitations where the state has a predominant interest. To learn more about the structure and authority of local governments in California, including the differences between general law and charter cities

and counties, refer to [this helpful overview from the Georgetown University Law Library](#) and [this summary \(PDF\) from the League of California Cities](#). You can also create a free account on the [League of California Cities' website to access its City Directory](#) and view all general law and charter cities in the state.

LHD Roles in PSE Change

LHDs can play multiple roles in advancing community-level PSE change. While the most appropriate role may vary by jurisdiction, LHDs can directly or indirectly provide support in the following ways:

- **Connector:** Convene and connect community residents, local government agencies, elected officials, advocates, and subject matter experts to support and strengthen community participation in policy development and implementation.
- **Investor:** Contribute funding, staffing, or in-kind resources to support local healthy eating and active living projects. This can include policy planning, development, and implementation, coalition building, or pilot efforts.
- **Expert:** Support local policy efforts through technical assistance and facilitation to help design policies, provide or analyze data, collaborate on strategies, review development applications, and consult on capital improvement projects.
- **Leader:** Lead by example. Bring a health equity lens into decision-making, model best practices, and help drive relationship building and trust across sectors.
- **Educator:** Translate public health evidence into accessible messaging for decision-makers and the public and help amplify community priorities and partner advocacy efforts.

Community Engagement

Community engagement must be ongoing, inclusive, and embedded across every phase of policy development and implementation. LHDs play a key role in advancing strategies that move beyond outreach to truly share power with communities – especially individuals historically excluded from decision-making. This means valuing lived experience as expertise, investing in accessible engagement practices, and creating meaningful opportunities for community leadership. Building trust requires consistent listening, transparency, and clear follow-through on community priorities. Effective community engagement also recognizes and builds on community strengths while adapting approaches to meet diverse needs and levels of participation. By fostering sustained, authentic partnerships, public health partners can help shift decision-making power and drive policies that more effectively advance health equity.

Policies

This agenda provides local jurisdictions with a menu of cross-sector policies that support healthy eating, active living, and chronic disease prevention and are data-informed, timely, and feasible. The following policies are included:

Land Use & Zoning

- Limits on unhealthy food retailer density
- Green space
- Food sales overlay zones, permits, & regulations
- Heat planning
- Environmental justice elements in California general plans

Active Transportation

- Complete Streets
- Vision Zero
- Other active transportation funding programs

Food Retail Environment

- Healthy checkout
- Sugar-sweetened beverage (SSB) taxes

Healthy Procurement

- Local healthy procurement & unhealthy food & beverage sales bans
- Values-based procurement
- Local wellness plans & policies
- Sugar-Sweetened Beverage (SSB) Sales Bans

School Food

- School Meals

Land Use & Zoning

Land use and zoning regulate development patterns in several ways. Development standards regulate the shape, size, and positioning of individual buildings on a lot. Zoning refers to the division of a jurisdiction into designated zones, which determine both permitted land uses and applicable development standards. Example land use zones include single-family residential, multifamily residential, commercial, and industrial. It is important to note that uses other than those named for the district may be permitted in a zone. For example, low impact uses such as religious uses, schools, and parks may be permitted in a single-family district.

Land use and zoning policies and regulations affect health in many ways. In the context of active living, development standards specify where sidewalks are located and how wide they are, which affects walkability and activity levels. Land use regulations that separate uses by large distances often create car dependency and promote sedentary lifestyles.¹ Land use regulations can affect food access by regulating where food can be grown or sold.² Development standards such as minimum parking requirements can severely restrict viable locations for grocery stores, making suburban locations more feasible than dense urban neighborhoods.

Many modern approaches to zoning aim to remedy the harms of past zoning decisions that failed to consider negative health effects and burdens on underrepresented communities. Examples of zoning levers that can be used to create a more equitable food landscape include restricting the density of fast food, alcohol, and tobacco retailers while incentivizing healthy food retail. Such incentives may include density bonuses, reduced parking requirements, expedited permitting, and allowing grocery store retail in residential zoning districts.

References

- 1 Constable Runkel S, AICP. MSA Professional Services. 2024. *Intersections of Health & the Built Environment, Part III: Land Use, Zoning & Transportation*. MSA. 2024. msa-ps.com/intersections-of-health-the-built-environment-part-iii-land-use-zoning-transportation/#:~:text=of%20development%20practices.,Zoning,retail%20and%20restaurants%20is%20apparent.
- 2 The Healthy Food Policy Project. *Zoning for Urban Agriculture*. 2024. healthyfoodpolicyproject.org/key-issues/zoning-for-urban-agriculture/#:~:text=More%20recently%2C%20the%20COVID%2D19,vegetable%20plants%20in%20front%20yards.

Limits on Unhealthy Food Retailer Density

Local zoning and land use regulations can be used to limit the proliferation of unhealthy food retailers, including fast-food restaurants, convenience stores, and liquor stores, in communities already overburdened by poor diet-related health outcomes.¹ These policies use the conditional use permit (CUP) process and related zoning tools to require discretionary review before new unhealthy food outlets can be established and, in some cases, to cap the total number of such outlets per geographic area or per population.² CUPs allow jurisdictions to require review or limit new establishments in overburdened areas. These inequities are rooted in historic disinvestment and discriminatory land use practices that have shaped food environments in communities of color and low-income communities.³ The goal of these policies is to reshape the food retail landscape by reserving commercial land for healthy food options, attracting sit-down restaurants and full-service grocers, and reducing diet-related health disparities rooted in racially inequitable land use decisions.^{4,5}

The primary policy mechanism available to local jurisdictions is local zoning authority, which is grounded in governments' police power to regulate land use for public health, safety, and welfare.⁶ In practice, this may include requiring CUPs and discretionary public review before new fast-food restaurants or convenience stores can be opened, setting density or distance limits on new permits, creating buffer zones around schools and youth-serving facilities, and exempting qualifying “healthy” establishments from some restrictions to promote healthier options.⁷

LHD Roles

LHDs can play an important role in advancing zoning policies that shape local food environments. LHDs can serve as **experts** by providing local data on food environments and disparities.⁸ They can also provide technical assistance during zoning updates and act as equity strategists, identifying communities disproportionately affected by unhealthy food environments and recommending targeted policy approaches to address those disparities.⁹ LHDs can also act as **connectors** by convening planning departments, community organizations, and policymakers.¹⁰

Limits on Unhealthy Food Retailer Density: Mini Community Engagement Plan

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
	The role each partner can play across each phase of the planning process.		
Residents & Community Members	- Identify priorities and share lived experience. - Guide and inform the planning process. - Identify culturally relevant solutions related to food access and retail environments.	- Participate in public meetings and hearings. - Co-lead community initiatives and advocacy efforts. - Provide feedback on zoning and permitting decisions.	- Assess whether policies reflect community needs. - Identify unintended effects and needed adjustments.
Community-Based Organizations & Advocacy Groups	- Identify community priorities. - Facilitate participation in the policy process. - Co-lead community engagement strategies.	- Mobilize residents to participate in the regulatory change process and provide public input on individual CUP applications. - Co-lead initiatives. - Support education and advocacy campaigns.	- Provide feedback on the implementation of CUPs. - Assess whether policies meet community needs or if changes are needed.
Local Health Departments (LHDs)	- Provide local data on food environments and health disparities. - Guide equity-centered policy development. - Support cross-sector coordination.	- Lead or support implementation efforts. - Provide technical assistance to planning departments. - Support community engagement activities.	- Track health outcomes and food environment changes. - Monitor disparities and policy impact over time.
Planning & Zoning Departments	Lead regulatory changes, zoning decisions, and technical drafting to ensure zoning consistency.	Lead or support cross-sector workgroups to successfully achieve policy outcomes.	Track permits and land use changes and trends over time.

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
The role each partner can play across each phase of the planning process.			
Building & Code Enforcement Departments	• Provide input on the enforceability of zoning standards and permit conditions. • Flag operational considerations related to inspections and compliance.	• Enforce zoning and permitting requirements through inspections and approvals. • Coordinate with planning departments on permit compliance and violations. • Support the implementation of CUP conditions.	• Track compliance issues and enforcement actions. • Identify implementation challenges and resource needs related to enforcement.

Action Steps for LHDs

Recommended action steps for limiting unhealthy food retailer density include the following:

- **Conduct a food environment assessment using local data.¹¹**
- **Engage cross-sector partners (as indicated in the Mini Community Engagement Plan).**
- **Introduce new regulatory changes or modify existing policies based on local needs and conditions.¹²**
- **Participate with partners in zoning updates and public processes in connection with CUP applications.¹³**
- **Review CUP applications and provide input from a public health perspective.¹⁴**
- **Incorporate provisions for ongoing evaluation and continued partner engagement to monitor how zoning changes influence the local food retail environment and health equity and refine implementation.¹⁵**

Implementation Considerations

Implementation of zoning-based density restrictions should prioritize new permit applicants rather than existing businesses, as these policies are typically applied prospectively. This can also make legal challenges less likely and reduce industry opposition.¹⁶

Ordinances should clearly define what constitutes an “unhealthy food retailer,” including which establishment types are covered, such as stand-alone fast-food restaurants, convenience stores, and liquor stores. Definitions that are overly broad can increase legal risk, while definitions that are too narrow may limit policy effectiveness.¹⁷

Zoning changes should be coordinated with the jurisdiction’s general plan. Alignment with adopted general plan goals strengthens legal defensibility and makes policy changes more resilient to political shifts and election cycles.¹⁸

Evidence from jurisdictions such as South Los Angeles suggests that zoning-based density restrictions, when implemented on their own, may have limited effects on obesity and dietary outcomes.^{19,20} For greater effectiveness, density limits should be paired with complementary strategies that actively support healthy food access, such as incentives for healthy food retailers, grocery store attraction programs, and community-based nutrition initiatives.^{21,22}

Jurisdictions should plan for implementation capacity when adopting zoning-based density restrictions. LHDs may need to establish ongoing protocols for reviewing permit applications. It can be helpful to establish roles, procedures, and interdepartmental agreements with planning departments.²³

Legal Considerations

Local governments have authority under their police power to regulate land use, including food retailer density.²⁴ Under the California Constitution (Article XI, Section 7), jurisdictions may adopt zoning regulations to protect public health.²⁵ CUPs are a valid tool to review and condition potentially harmful uses.²⁶ Existing businesses are generally treated as nonconforming uses – meaning that if zoning rules change, a business that was legal before the change is usually allowed to stay, even if it no longer fits the new rules. The use becomes a “nonconforming” use: it can typically continue operating, but it may face limits on expansion, rebuilding, or changes over

time.²⁷ Policies must be based on legitimate public health rationale and applied consistently.²⁸ Under the California Retail Food Code, food facilities must comply with applicable local requirements, including zoning and land use regulations.²⁹

Community Empowerment Strategies

Community members, particularly those in neighborhoods most affected by the overconcentration of unhealthy food retail outlets, should be meaningfully engaged throughout policy development, implementation, and evaluation.³⁰ Community input helps decision-makers design policies that address residents' interconnected health, economic, and cultural priorities, reduces the risk of unintended negative consequences, and can be helpful for tracking additional related needs.³¹ This may include taking steps to remove barriers to participation in public hearings and coalition building.³²

Anticipated Challenges

Advancing zoning-based restrictions on unhealthy food retailers can be politically and legally complex. LHDs and their partners should anticipate and prepare for the following challenges:

Industry opposition. Fast-food companies and food retail trade associations have historically opposed density restrictions, arguing that they reduce consumer choice and burden small business owners. LHDs should be prepared to respond with strong public health evidence and community voices.^{33,34}

Evidence of limited impact in isolation. The 2008 South Los Angeles fast-food moratorium is the most studied example of this type of policy.³⁵ Research found that obesity rates continued to rise, in part because chains opened new locations in strip malls not covered by the ordinance, and convenience stores filled the gap.³⁶ These findings underscore the importance of complementary strategies and careful policy design.

Concerns about displacement and economic harm. Some community members and advocates raise concerns that density restrictions may harm small, locally owned food businesses disproportionately, while larger chains find workarounds.³⁷ Ordinance design should account for these concerns by defining covered establishment types carefully and including small business protections where appropriate.^{38,39}

Complexity of regulatory changes and timeline considerations. Integrating health-based density restrictions into existing zoning codes requires sustained engagement with planning staff and legal counsel and may take several years.⁴⁰ LHDs should plan for a multi-year policy development timeline.⁴¹

Short- and long-term outcomes for measuring success. Changes in food retail density may not translate quickly or directly into measurable improvements in dietary intake or chronic disease rates.^{42,43} LHDs should establish and track intermediate outcomes (e.g., number of new healthy food retailers permitted, changes in the Retail Food Environment Index by census tract) alongside long-term health outcomes.⁴⁴

References

- 1 Pomeranz JL. *Advancing public health through zoning: regulating the density of fast food restaurants*. Duke Forum for Law & Social Change; 2013. scholarship.law.duke.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1037&context=dfisc.
- 2 ChangeLab Solutions. *Justice on the Menu*. 2024. changelabsolutions.org/product/justice-menu.
- 3 *Ibid*.
- 4 Hagan E, Rubin V. *Economic and Community Development Outcomes of Healthy Food Retail*. PolicyLink; 2013. Accessed April 1, 2026. healthyeatingresearch.org/research/economic-and-community-development-outcomes-of-healthy-food-retail.
- 5 Haynes-Maslow L, Leone LA, Serrano N, et al. Contributions of structural racism to the food environment and obesity: perspectives of Black residents in a Southeastern city. *Health Educ Behav*. 2023;50(2):275-286. Accessed April 1, 2026. ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9710204.
- 6 Ashe M, Jernigan D, Kline R, Galaz R. Land use planning and the control of alcohol, tobacco, firearms, and fast food restaurants. *Am J Public Health*. 2003;93(9):1404-1408. doi:10.2105/ajph.93.9.1404.
- 7 ChangeLab Solutions. *Justice on the Menu*. 2024. changelabsolutions.org/product/justice-menu.
- 8 Sreedhara M, Goins KV, Frisard C, Rosal MC, Lemon SC. Healthy Eating Policy Strategies in Community Health Improvement Plans: A Cross-Sectional Survey of US Local Health Departments. *J Public Health Manag Pract*. 2021;27(2):125-134. doi:10.1097/PHH.0000000000001104

- 9 Public Health Law Center. *Increasing Access to Healthy Food: A Planning Toolkit*. 2019. Accessed April 1, 2026. publichealthlawcenter.org/sites/default/files/resources/Planning-Toolkit-Access-Healthy-Food-Linking-Goals-and-Actions-2019.pdf.
- 10 National Academy of Medicine. *Health in All Policies: Improving Health Through Intersectoral Collaboration*. 2024. Accessed April 1, 2026. nam.edu/perspectives/health-in-all-policies-improving-health-through-intersectoral-collaboration.
- 11 Cities for Better Health. *Foodscapes Assessment Toolkit*. 2023. Accessed April 1, 2026. citiesforbetterhealth.com/resources/tools/foodscapes-assessment-toolkit.html.
- 12 ChangeLab Solutions. *Model Healthy Food Zone Ordinance*. 2013. Accessed April 1, 2026. changelabsolutions.org/product/model-healthy-food-zone-ordinance.
- 13 Public Health Law Center. *Increasing Access to Healthy Food: Linking Planning Goals & Implementation Actions*. 2019. Accessed April 1, 2026. publichealthlawcenter.org/sites/default/files/resources/Planning-Toolkit-Access-Healthy-Food-Linking-Goals-and-Actions-2019.pdf.
- 14 ChangeLab Solutions. *Model Healthy Food Zone Ordinance*. 2013. Accessed April 1, 2026. changelabsolutions.org/product/model-healthy-food-zone-ordinance.
- 15 CDC. Developing an Evaluation Plan: CDC Program Evaluation Framework Step 2. Atlanta, GA: US Department of Health and Human Services, CDC; 2023. Accessed April 3, 2026. cdc.gov/evaluation/guide/step2/index.htm.
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 ChangeLab Solutions. *Model Healthy Food Zone Ordinance*. 2013. Accessed April 29, 2026. changelabsolutions.org/product/model-healthy-food-zone-ordinance.
- 18 Institute for Local Government. *General Plans and Zoning: A Toolkit for Local Governments*. 2010. Accessed April 1, 2026. ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/resources__finalbook_0.pdf.
- 19 Sturm R, Cohen DA. Zoning for health? The year-old ban on new fast-food restaurants in South LA. *Health Aff (Millwood)*. 2009;28(6):w1088-w1097. Accessed April 1, 2026. healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hlthaff.28.6.w1088.
- 20 Fleischhacker SE, Evenson KR, Rodriguez DA, Sarasua SM. Local government retail incentives for healthier food retailers in the USA. *Public Health Nutr*. 2019;22(12):2312-2321. Accessed April 1, 2026. ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10260514.

- 21 Sturm R, Cohen DA. Zoning for health? The year-old ban on new fast-food restaurants in South LA. *Health Aff (Millwood)*. 2009;28(6):w1088-w1097. Accessed April 1, 2026. healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hlthaff.28.6.w1088.
- 22 Fleischhacker SE, Evenson KR, Rodriguez DA, Sarasua SM. Local government retail incentives for healthier food retailers in the USA. *Public Health Nutr*. 2019;22(12):2312-2321. Accessed April 1, 2026. ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10260514.
- 23 NACCHO. *Local Health Department Strategies for Implementing Health in All Policies*. NACCHO; 2014. Accessed April 1, 2026. naccho.org/uploads/downloadable-resources/Programs/Community-Health/factsheet_hiap_dec2014-1.pdf.
- 24 Gostin LO, Hadley J, Ransom M. Land use planning and the control of alcohol, tobacco, firearms, and fast food outlets. *Am J Public Health*. 2002;92(9):1404-1408. Accessed April 1, 2026. ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1447982.
- 25 California Constitution, article XI, section 7. (stating A county or city may make and enforce within its limits all local, police, sanitary, and other ordinances and regulations not in conflict with general laws). Accessed April 1, 2026. law.justia.com/constitution/california/article-xi/section-7.
- 26 Ashe M, Jernigan D, Kline R, Galaz R. Zoning and licensing to regulate the retail environment and achieve public health goals. *Duke Forum for Law & Social Change*. 2013;5(1):1-26. Accessed April 1, 2026. scholarship.law.duke.edu/dflsc/vol5/iss1/2.
- 27 Legal Information Institute. Nonconforming use. Cornell Law School. Accessed April 1, 2026. law.cornell.edu/wex/nonconforming_use.
- 28 Ashe M, Jernigan D, Kline R, Galaz R. Zoning and licensing to regulate the retail environment and achieve public health goals. *Duke Forum for Law & Social Change*. 2013;5(1):1-26. Accessed April 1, 2026. scholarship.law.duke.edu/dflsc/vol5/iss1/2.
- 29 California Retail Food Code. In: California Health and Safety Code, §§ 113700–114437. § 113715. Accessed April 1, 2026. ochealthinfo.com/sites/healthcare/files/2024-01/CalCode%20effective%20January%202024%20Digital.pdf.
- 30 Ohri-Vachaspati P, Turner L, DeWeese RS, et al. Community-engaged research strategies used in food retail interventions: a systematic review. *J Acad Nutr Diet*. 2025;125(5):932-952. Accessed April 1, 2026. ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC12477712.

- 31 Raghavan R, Kumanyika S, Weiss L, et al. Coalition building and food insecurity: how an equity and justice framework can support systems change. *Health Educ Behav.* 2022;49(5):743-754. Accessed April 1, 2026. [ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9517197/](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/3517197/).
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 BMSG. *Evaluating the Public Debate Over Fast Food Zoning.* 2018. Accessed April 2, 2026. bmsg.org/about-us/our-projects/evaluating-the-public-debate-over-fast-food-zoning.
- 34 Nixon L, Mejia P, Dorfman L, et al. Fast-food fights: news coverage of local efforts to improve food environments through land-use regulations, 2001–2013. *Am J Public Health.* 2015;105(3):e32-e38. Accessed April 2, 2026. [ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4330826/](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/264330826/).
- 35 Sturm R, Hattori A. Diet and obesity in Los Angeles County 2007–2012: is there a measurable effect of the 2008 “Fast-Food Ban”? *Soc Sci Med.* 2015;133:205-211. Accessed April 2, 2026. [sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0277953615001409](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0277953615001409).
- 36 *Ibid.*
- 37 Hagan E, Rubin V. *Economic and Community Development Outcomes of Healthy Food Retail.* PolicyLink; 2013. Accessed April 2, 2026. healthyeatingresearch.org/research/economic-and-community-development-outcomes-of-healthy-food-retail.
- 38 Haynes-Maslow L, Leone LA, Serrano N, et al. Contributions of structural racism to the food environment and obesity: perspectives of Black residents in a Southeastern city. *Health Educ Behav.* 2023;50(2):275-286. Accessed April 2, 2026. [ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9710204/](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/409710204/).
- 39 ChangeLab Solutions. *Model Healthy Food Zone Ordinance.* 2013. Accessed April 29, 2026. changelabsolutions.org/product/model-healthy-food-zone-ordinance.
- 40 Johns M, Ghirardelli A. *Zoning Against Unhealthy Food Sources in New York City.* New York City Food Policy Center; 2010. Accessed April 2, 2026. nycfoodpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Zoning-Against-Unhealthy-Food-Sources-in-New-York-City_2010.pdf.
- 41 County Health Rankings & Roadmaps. *Zoning Regulation and Land Use Policy Reforms.* 2022. Accessed April 2, 2026. countyhealthrankings.org/strategies-and-solutions/what-works-for-health/strategies/zoning-regulation-and-land-use-policy-reforms.

- 42 Johns M, Ghirardelli A. *Zoning Against Unhealthy Food Sources in New York City*. New York City Food Policy Center; 2010. Accessed April 2, 2026. nycfoodpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Zoning-Against-Unhealthy-Food-Sources-in-New-York-City_2010.pdf.
- 43 County Health Rankings & Roadmaps. *Zoning Regulation and Land Use Policy Reforms*. 2022. Accessed April 2, 2026. countyhealthrankings.org/strategies-and-solutions/what-works-for-health/strategies/zoning-regulation-and-land-use-policy-reforms.
- 44 Pérez-Ferrer C, Auchincloss AH, Sánchez BN, et al. The Retail Food Environment Index and its association with dietary patterns, BMI, and socioeconomic position. *Public Health Nutr*. 2024;27(10):1234-1245. Accessed April 2, 2026. ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC11466391.

Green Space

Communities can use zoning and land use policies to protect, create, and enhance parks and open space. This can be done through zoning ordinance updates that permit a variety of green spaces across most or all zoning districts. Examples of green space that should be incorporated as explicitly allowable uses in land use plans and zoning codes include sports fields, parks, playgrounds, plazas, lawns, and community gardens. These green spaces support public health by allowing for recreation and walking, improving air quality and mental health, and curbing urban heat island effect. General plans can prioritize the conversion of suitable vacant and government-owned lots to green spaces. Park district plans should incorporate park system connectivity (e.g., multiuse pathways, trails) to facilitate opportunities for longer and varied types of physical activity. Sustainability plans can also ensure the long-term preservation of green space through conservation easements.¹

LHD Roles

Most of these efforts are spearheaded by city and county planning departments. However, LHDs can support them as experts and educators. As **experts**, LHDs can provide park districts and planning departments with mapped health and activity data that show spatial disparities in access to green space. They can also work with planners to include health effects (e.g., changes in physical activity or recreation) as criteria when evaluating zoning updates and setting goals and strategies in the general plan. In these supportive roles, LHDs can provide expert testimony at plan commission and city council hearings where decisions are being made about implementing zoning updates to expand access to green space for active living and recreation. As **educators**, LHDs can inform the public and other elected and nonelected decision-makers about the long-term health implications of changes to the built environment.

Action Steps for LHDs

Recommended action steps for using zoning to support active lifestyles through the expansion of green space include the following:

- **Identify the existing zoning codes that may have contributed to promoting sedentary lifestyles and car dependency, then create a timeline to amend and repeal those laws.**

- Engage with partners to assess the impact of the sedentary lifestyle problem. Partners may include:
 - Disability advocacy groups
 - Community members from diverse backgrounds
 - Parks and recreation staff
 - Health care and public health staff
- Consult partners on the following decisions:
 - Spacing and design of green spaces
 - Phasing of green space construction
 - Locations of parks and larger designated recreational outdoor spaces
 - Designated funding streams for park maintenance
- Set appropriate goals and ensure efforts are funded, and the appropriate accountability channels are outlined. These terms can be codified in an update to the general plan.
- Establish a long-term monitoring plan to assess the efficacy of implemented strategies.

Green Space: Mini Community Engagement Plan

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
The role each partner can play across each phase of the planning process.			
Residents & Community Members	• Identify priorities and share lived experience. • Guide and inform the planning process.	• Participate in programs. • Co-lead initiatives. • Provide ongoing feedback.	• Assess outcomes. • Assess whether policies reflect community needs.
Community-Based Organizations, Disability Advocates, & Active Transportation Advocacy Groups	• Identify community priorities. • Facilitate participation in the policy process. • Co-lead outreach.	• Mobilize residents. • Co-lead initiatives.	• Provide ongoing feedback. • Assess whether policies meet community needs.

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
	The role each partner can play across each phase of the planning process.		
Local Health Departments (LHDs)	• Provide health data. • Guide equity strategies.	• Lead interventions. • Support community programs. • Provide expert testimony at plan commission and city council hearings.	• Track health outcomes. • Monitor disparities.
Planning & Zoning Departments	• Integrate environmental justice into land use plans. • Convene cross-sector partners to help guide the planning process.	• Create cross-sector workgroups to achieve policy outcomes.	• Track the square footage expansion of green space at regular intervals. • Establish success metrics, such as green space per 1,000 residents.
Park Districts	• Identify gaps and inequities in green space access. • Provide expertise on park design and typologies. • Provide expertise on green space connectivity and systems planning.	• Coordinate long-term maintenance and operation. • Coordinate sustained funding strategies.	• Monitor green space usage, either through automated or manual observation methods, to assess usage gaps (e.g., seasons, physical ability, time of day).

Implementation Strategies

City and county planning departments can ensure SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound) goals pertaining to green space access are embedded within the environmental justice element of their general plans. They should coordinate with relevant governing bodies, such as park districts and local planning departments. They can also consider using pilot programs to test potential outcomes and efficacy of proposed zoning changes. Piloting allows for iterative refinement of zoning updates without needing to go through the full city council or county board ordinance adoption process. These strategies should be considered for a holistic and effective zoning update.

Legal Considerations

Land use and zoning are often under the jurisdiction of city and county governments. However, in California, some state laws regulate local zoning. A list of California state laws that may affect local implementation of the zoning policies discussed above include:

- **Planning for Healthy Communities Act (2016, SB 1000):** Requires cities and counties to integrate environmental justice into their general plans and reduce disparities in access to green space, parks, and recreational facilities
- **The California Neighborhood Food Act (2014, AB 2561):** Prohibits homeowners associations (HOA), landlords, and local jurisdictions from banning backyard gardens
- **California Consistency Requirement (2023, AB 821):** Requires local zoning ordinances to be in alignment with the adopted general plan

Community Empowerment Strategies

Various community engagement opportunities are listed in the action steps above. To enhance equity in the community engagement process, community stakeholders should be allowed to define the problem, identify and create solutions, and have shared decision-making power. This can be done by establishing a community advisory board including priority populations and other representative stakeholders.² Community empowerment can be further enhanced by giving advisory boards authority to monitor the implementation of zoning changes for efficacy and any unintended consequences.

Anticipated Challenges

Challenges to green space expansion and access are most likely to come from developers seeking to infill or redevelop existing parcels in dense urban areas where land values are high. Green space site requirements can impact the financial feasibility of projects. There may also be site constraints to consider, such as irregularly shaped lots.

References

- 1 Poortinga W, Denney J, Kelly K M, et al. Associations of reported access to public green space, physical activity and subjective wellbeing during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*. Volume 97;2024;102376.
- 2 ChangeLab Solutions. The Planner's Playbook. 2020. Accessed April 29, 2026. changelabsolutions.org/product/planners-playbook.

Food Sales Overlay Zones, Permits, & Regulations

Local governments use healthy and unhealthy food retail overlay districts to designate areas within a city where additional regulations either restrict unhealthy food retailers, such as fast-food restaurants and convenience stores, or incentivize healthy food retail establishments. These “overlay zones” are layered over existing zoning districts to change consumer behavior by promoting and increasing access to healthier, more nutritious whole foods instead of calorie-dense, highly processed foods.^{1,2} The expected health outcomes of these changes in consumer behavior include reduced obesity rates and improved cardiovascular and metabolic health.³ These zones are typically in areas with high rates of diet-related diseases and limited access to grocery stores.

Examples of restrictions on unhealthy food retail establishments include:

- **Density caps or spacing requirements on fast-food establishments, convenience stores, and liquor stores**
- **Moratoriums on new unhealthy food retail establishments, which can be established after a healthy food overlay zone is established**
- **Proximity restrictions on unhealthy food retailers near child-centered land uses, especially schools, parks, and childcare centers**
- **Limits on the construction of drive-through restaurants**

Incentives for healthy food retail are often used in conjunction with restrictions on unhealthy food retail. Examples of healthy food retail incentives include:

- **Reduced sign permit fees or expedited sign permit issuance**
- **Special grants for businesses that focus on stocking and serving foods and meals that meet specific nutrition standards**
- **Tax breaks or grants for grocery stores or healthy food retailers**
- **Zoning flexibility measures, such as parking waivers, reduced setbacks, and relaxed design standards**
- **Expedited permitting and permit processing**

LHD Roles

Most of these efforts are spearheaded by city and county planning departments. However, LHDs can support them as **experts** on community nutrition and the long-term health implications of living in food deserts. LHDs can provide expert testimony at plan commission and city council hearings where decisions are being made about implementing zoning updates to support a healthy food retail environment.

Action Steps for LHDs

Recommended action steps for using unhealthy and healthy food retail overlay districts to support healthy food choices and consumer behavior include the following:

- **Identify the existing zoning codes pertaining to the development of food retail establishments (e.g., grocery stores, farmers markets, convenience stores, fast-food restaurants) that may have contributed to a proliferation unhealthy food retailers and constraints on healthy food retailers, then create a timeline to amend and repeal those laws.**
- **Identify food deserts and areas with a high incidence of diet-related diseases. Areas near child-centered land uses, such as childcare centers, parks, playgrounds, and schools, may also be targeted for overlay districts.**
- **Engage with partners to assess the impact of the limited healthy food retail access challenge. This engagement should also assess the competing interests of various stakeholders. Partners may include:**
 - **Food retailers**
 - **Food manufacturers**
 - **Restaurant owners**
 - **Community members from diverse backgrounds**
 - **Health care and public health staff**
- **Consult partners on the following decisions:**
 - **Boundaries of special overlay districts**
 - **Appropriate zoning solution standards, such as spacing and density**
 - **Incentives for special overlay districts**

- Set appropriate goals and ensure efforts are funded, and the appropriate accountability channels are outlined. These terms can be codified in an update to the general plan.
- Establish a long-term monitoring plan to assess the efficacy of implemented strategies.

Food Sales Overlay Zones, Permits, & Regulations: Mini Community Engagement Plan

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
	The role each partner can play across each phase of the planning process.		
Residents & Community Members	• Identify priorities and share lived experience. • Guide and inform the planning process. • Identify culturally relevant solutions related to food access and retail environments.	• Participate in public meetings and hearings. • Co-lead community initiatives and advocacy efforts. • Provide feedback on zoning and permitting decisions.	• Assess whether policies reflect community needs. • Identify unintended effects and needed adjustments.
Food Retailers, Restaurant Owners, & Food Manufacturers	• Provide insight into market conditions and existing purchasing patterns. • Identify rules that may challenge economic or operational feasibility. • Identify effective incentives.	• Participate in policy development (this has been shown to lead to increased compliance).	• Provide sales data to reveal changes in purchasing behavior. • Provide customer feedback collected through customer interactions.
Community-Based Organizations & Food Justice Advocacy Groups	• Identify community priorities. • Facilitate participation in the policy process. • Co-lead or lead community engagement strategies.	• Mobilize residents to participate in the regulatory change process. • Co-lead initiatives. • Support education and advocacy campaigns.	• Assess whether policies meet community needs or if changes are needed.

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
	The role each partner can play across each phase of the planning process.		
Local Health Departments (LHDs)	• Provide local data on food environments and health disparities. • Guide equity-centered policy development. • Support cross-sector coordination.	• Lead or support implementation efforts. • Provide technical assistance to planning departments. • Support community engagement activities. • Provide expert testimony at city council and plan commission hearings.	• Track health outcomes and food environment changes. • Monitor disparities and policy impact over time.
Planning & Zoning Departments	• Lead regulatory changes, zoning decisions, and technical drafting to ensure zoning consistency.	• Lead or support cross-sector workgroups to successfully achieve policy outcomes.	• Track permits and land use changes and trends over time.
Building & Code Enforcement Departments	• Provide input on the enforceability of zoning standards and permit conditions. • Flag operational considerations related to inspections and compliance.	• Enforce zoning and permitting requirements through inspections and approvals. • Coordinate with planning departments on permit compliance and violations.	• Track compliance issues and enforcement actions. • Identify implementation challenges and resource needs related to enforcement.

Legal Considerations

Land use and zoning are often under the jurisdiction of city and county governments. However, in California, some state laws regulate local zoning. A list of California state laws that may affect local implementation of the zoning policies discussed above include:

- **Planning for Healthy Communities Act (2016, SB 1000):** Requires cities and counties to integrate environmental justice into their general plans, identify priority communities, and promote healthy food access
- **California Consistency Requirement (2023, AB 821):** Requires local zoning ordinances to be alignment with the adopted general plan
- **Safe Sidewalk Vending Act (2018, SB 946):** Decriminalizes street vending as long as vendors are operating with the required health and vendor permits

Community Empowerment Strategies

Various community engagement opportunities are listed in the action steps above. To enhance equity in the community engagement process, community stakeholders should be allowed to define the problem, identify and create solutions, and have shared decision-making power. This can be done by establishing a community advisory board including priority populations and other representative stakeholders.⁴ Community empowerment can be further enhanced by giving advisory boards authority to monitor the implementation of zoning changes for efficacy and any unintended consequences.

Anticipated Challenges

Challenges to land use and zoning changes are most likely to come from restaurants, retail owners, and residents. The restaurant and food retail industry and lobbying groups regularly challenge fast-food moratoriums, drive-through restrictions,⁵ and density caps, citing paternalism and arguing that consumers and retailers should be able to sell and purchase food freely so long as they meet US Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) safety standards. There may also be challenges regarding the restriction of economic opportunity in low-income neighborhoods by restricting businesses.

Some arguments and talking points to address these concerns include:

- **When paired with supportive economic incentives, these zoning changes can make it easier for other types of food retail and businesses (e.g., culturally responsive grocers and restaurants) to open in the affected neighborhoods. This can level the playing field and offer small businesses a competitive advantage over large fast-food and retail chains.**
- **These interventions are not about paternalism and restricting choice, but rather correcting a market flaw that allows fast-food restaurants and convenience stores to overconcentrate in low-income neighborhoods due to cheaper land prices. These tools aim to rebalance the local food retail environment.**

Implementation Strategies

City and county planning departments can ensure SMART goals pertaining to healthy eating are embedded within the environmental justice element of their general plans. They should coordinate with relevant governing bodies, such as LHDs. They can also consider using pilot programs to test potential outcomes and efficacy of proposed zoning changes. Piloting allows for iterative refinement of zoning updates without needing to go through the full city council or county board ordinance adoption process. These strategies should be considered for a holistic and effective zoning update.

References

- 1 Frost H, Te Morenga L, Mackay S, et al. Impact of unhealthy food/drink marketing exposure to children in New Zealand: a systematic narrative review. *Health Promot Int.* 2025;40(2):daaf021. doi:10.1093/heapro/daaf021.
- 2 Boyland E, et al. Food marketing, eating and health outcomes in children and adults: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *The British journal of nutrition.* vol. 133,6; 2025: 781-805. doi:10.1017/S0007114524000102.
- 3 Child-focused Advertising Restrictions for Unhealthy Foods & Beverages. County Health Rankings & Roadmaps. 2019. countyhealthrankings.org/strategies-and-solutions/what-works-for-health/strategies/child-focused-advertising-restrictions-for-unhealthy-foods-beverages.

- 4 ChangeLab Solutions. The Planner's Playbook. 2020. Accessed April 29, 2026. changelabsolutions.org/product/planners-playbook.
- 5 National Restaurant Association. *Local Drive Thru Bans*. 2023. hrestaurant.org/getmedia/45df9058-39fa-4298-b72b-934e9615dda6/local-drive-thru-bans.pdf.

Heat Planning

According to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), extreme heat events are days when peak daytime temperatures exceed 95°F. These events are projected to increase as a result of climate change.¹ Extreme heat is uniquely detrimental to California because it increases the likelihood of wildfires.² As such, California residents face negative health effects not only from the extreme heat itself (e.g., heat stroke, dehydration, respiratory distress, heart attacks), but also from the inhalation of smoke and carcinogens from emissions, which can lead to respiratory illnesses and cancers.³ Additionally, health implications of displacement – a potential result of extreme heat or wildfires – include poor mental health, heart attacks, and susceptibility to infectious diseases.⁴ Beyond climate change, factors that contribute to extreme heat in an urban environment include lack of tree canopies, dark asphalt surfaces, and vehicle emissions.

Heat planning is a climate resilience and public health strategy that aims to combat the negative effects of extreme heat events, wildfires, and the urban heat island effect. Effective heat planning integrates land use and zoning, transit planning, infrastructure investment, and public health data to identify priority areas, often focusing on neighborhoods with limited green space and populations at a higher risk of poor health outcomes due to extreme heat, such as older adults, infants, unhoused individuals, pregnant people, individuals with chronic diseases, and low-income residents.^{5,6} Strategies may include expanding tree canopies, increasing access to shaded and green spaces, updating housing habitability standards to account for extreme heat, requiring cool or reflective roofing and paving materials, and incorporating heat mitigation standards into development codes. Heat planning also includes preparedness and response measures that protect residents during extreme heat events. This can involve establishing cooling centers, improving public communication systems, and coordinating with local agencies, utilities, and community-based organizations to ensure vulnerable populations are reached.⁷ Comprehensive heat planning strategies make it safer for community members, including vulnerable populations, to engage in active lifestyles, thereby improving cardiovascular health.

LHD Roles

The planning, mitigation, and response efforts for local heat planning are typically coordinated across multiple public and private agencies. Local planning departments take the lead on efforts to mitigate extreme heat, such as the expansion of green space and tree canopy and implementation of heat-mitigating building code standards. However, LHDs serve as **leaders** on preparedness and response efforts by coordinating with hospitals to ensure increased capacity during extreme heat events and communicating with the public about safety measures. As **investors**, they can contribute funds to support infrastructure such as green space expansion and establishment of cooling centers. As **experts**, they can use their access to spatial health data to identify neighborhood-level heat risks and concentrations of vulnerable people with chronic diseases. As **educators**, LHDs can conduct public awareness campaigns about heat dangers.

Action Steps for LHDs

Recommended action steps for using heat planning to support active lifestyles include:⁸

- **Establish a task force or advisory group with experts in heat mitigation and response and heat-vulnerable community members. Stakeholders may include:**
 - **Planning and zoning staff**
 - **Emergency management and response departments**
 - **Park districts**
 - **People with lived experience being heat-vulnerable**
- **Conduct a heat vulnerability assessment, overlaying health and social vulnerability indicators and areas prone to extreme heat.**
- **Implement multilingual communication systems and channels.**
- **Work with community groups and residents from diverse backgrounds to identify where cooling centers are most needed and any barriers to using emergency heat services.**
- **Set appropriate goals and ensure efforts are funded, and the appropriate accountability channels are outlined. These terms can be codified in an update to the general and public health plans.**

- **Prioritize community engagement and sustained funding to maintain and expand interventions.**
- **Embed heat resilience into the environmental justice element of general plans.**
- **Establish a long-term monitoring plan to assess the efficacy of implemented strategies.**

Heat Planning: Mini Community Engagement Plan

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
The role each partner can play across each phase of the planning process.			
Residents & Community Members	• Identify priorities and share lived experience. • Guide and inform the planning process.	• Participate in public meetings and hearings. • Co-lead community initiatives and advocacy efforts.	• Assess whether policies reflect community needs. • Identify unintended effects and needed adjustments.
Community-Based Organizations Serving Heat-Vulnerable Populations	• Identify community priorities. • Facilitate participation in the policy process. • Co-lead or lead community engagement strategies.	• Mobilize residents to participate in the regulatory change process. • Co-lead initiatives. • Support education and advocacy campaigns.	• Assess whether policies meet community needs or if changes are needed.

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
	The role each partner can play across each phase of the planning process.		
Local Health Departments (LHDs)	Conduct heat vulnerability assessments.	- Lead or support implementation efforts. - Provide technical assistance to planning departments. - Fund the expansion of heat mitigation and response infrastructure. - Support community engagement activities. - Provide expert testimony at city council and plan commission hearings. - Conduct public awareness campaigns regarding heat safety.	- Track health outcomes and environmental changes. - Monitor disparities and policy impact over time.
Emergency Response, Hospitals, & Health Care Providers	- Develop an extreme heat event response plan. - Provide data on past extreme heat events, such as emergency department visits.	- Align hospital protocols with city and state emergency plans. - Educate vulnerable patients on heat risk.	Monitor extreme heat event response data over time.
Planning & Zoning Departments	Lead regulatory changes, zoning decisions, and land use and building code technical drafting.	Support cross-sector workgroups to successfully achieve policy outcomes.	Track permits and land use changes and trends over time.

Legal Considerations

Land use and zoning are often under the jurisdiction of city and county governments. However, in California, some state laws regulate local zoning. A list of California state laws that may affect local implementation of the zoning policies discussed above include:

- **Planning for Healthy Communities Act (2016, SB 1000):** Requires cities and counties to integrate environmental justice into their general plans and to identify and mitigate climate-related risks, including extreme heat, that disproportionately affect disadvantaged communities
- **California Consistency Requirement (2023, AB 821):** Requires local zoning ordinances to be alignment with the adopted general plan
- **[Protecting Californians From Extreme Heat Plan \(PDF\)](#):** Although not a law, this plan includes goals on increasing the resilience of the built environment and using nature-based solutions⁹

Community Empowerment Strategies

Various community engagement opportunities are listed in the action steps above. To enhance equity the community engagement process, community stakeholders should be allowed to define the problem, identify and create solutions, and have shared decision-making power. This can be done by establishing a community advisory board including priority populations and other representative stakeholders.¹⁰ Community empowerment can be further enhanced by giving advisory boards authority to monitor the implementation of zoning changes for efficacy and any unintended consequences.

Anticipated Challenges

One of the major anticipated challenges in implementing heat planning is that it spans multiple government and private agencies, such as hospitals, and coordination can be difficult due to differing timelines and priorities. There may also be limited or unstable funding for heat planning and response or pushback from commercial landlords – especially related to updating building codes and changing the housing habitability standards.

Implementation Strategies

City and county planning departments can ensure SMART goals pertaining to heat planning are embedded within the environmental justice element of their general plans. They should coordinate with relevant governing bodies, such as LHDs. They can also consider using pilot programs to test potential outcomes and efficacy of proposed zoning changes. Piloting allows for iterative refinement of zoning updates without needing to go through the full city council or county board ordinance adoption process. These strategies should be considered for a holistic and effective zoning update.

References

- 1 Environmental Protection Agency. Extreme Heat 2025. US EPA. August 22, 2025. epa.gov/climatechange-science/extreme-heat.
- 2 California Air Resources Board. Wildfires & Climate Change. Accessed April 29, 2026. arb.ca.gov/wildfires-climate-change.
- 3 Benmarhnia T, Errett N A, Casey J A. Beneath the smoke: Understanding the public health impacts of the Los Angeles urban wildfires. *Environmental epidemiology*. 2025; 9(3), e388. doi.org/10.1097/EE9.0000000000000388.
- 4 World Health Organization, CDC, Kaiser Family Foundation. 2021. *Health and Affordable Housing Fact Sheet: The Public Health Implications of Housing Instability, Eviction, and Homelessness*. 2021. networkforphl.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/The-Public-Health-Implications-of-Housing-Instability-Eviction-and-Homelessness.pdf.
- 5 Ladd K, Meerow S. *Planning for Urban Heat Resilience*. PAS Report 600. American Planning Association Planning Advisory Service. 2022. Accessed April 3, 2026. planning-org-uploaded-media.s3.amazonaws.com/publication/download_pdf/PAS-Report-600-r1.pdf.
- 6 Dzyuban Y, Hondula D M, Coseo P J, Redman, C L. Public transit infrastructure and heat perceptions in hot and dry climates. *International journal of biometeorology*. 2022; 66(2), 345–356. doi.org/10.1007/s00484-021-02074-4.
- 7 American Public Health Association. *Principles of Comprehensive Health Planning for Personal Health Services*. 2014. apha.org/policy-and-advocacy/public-health-policy-briefs/policy-database/2014/07/16/13/46/principles-of-comprehensive-health-planning-for-personal-health-services.

- 8 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and National Integrated Heat Health Information System. *Introduction to Heat Tabletop Planning and Coordination*. 2024. heat.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Introduction_to_Heat_Tabletop_Planning_Coordination_V1.pdf.
- 9 California Natural Resources Agency. *Protecting Californians From Extreme Heat*. 2022. resources.ca.gov/-/media/CNRA-Website/Files/Initiatives/Climate-Resilience/2022-Final-Extreme-Heat-Action-Plan.pdf.
- 10 ChangeLab Solutions. *The Planner's Playbook*. 2020. Accessed April 29, 2026. changelabsolutions.org/product/planners-playbook.

Environmental Justice Elements in California General Plans

A general plan documents a jurisdiction's vision for how it will develop in the future. In California, general plans must include the following elements: land use, circulation (i.e., transportation), housing, conservation, open space, noise, safety, and air quality.¹ Jurisdictions may choose to adopt additional elements, such as health, social justice, or economic development, depending on their priorities. In 2016, California passed Senate Bill 1000, requiring cities and counties to identify communities disproportionately affected by pollution and environmental hazards and adopt either a formal environmental justice element or integrate environmental justice goals, policies, and programs into other elements to address these disparities through their general plans.²

The goal of environmental justice elements is to improve health outcomes by reducing environmental health risks in disadvantaged communities.³ Environmental justice elements require jurisdictions to address key issue areas such as pollution exposure, food access, safe and sanitary housing, access to public facilities, opportunities for physical activity, and inclusive community engagement. They can also include specific strategies (e.g., goals, objectives, policies, programs) related to nutrition and physical activity. These strategies will likely overlap with those in other elements, such as land use, circulation, and open space.

Examples of goals to promote access to healthy food include:

- **Ensure sources of healthy foods are available in all neighborhoods.**
- **Avoid disproportionate concentrations of unhealthy food sources within neighborhoods.**

Examples of goals to increase physical activity include:

- **Leverage city resources for parks and recreation facilities through partnerships, joint use agreements, private facilities, outside funding, and community volunteers.**
- **Prioritize youth in the development and implementation of recreation facilities and programs.**

The goals should also include specific objectives, policies, and programs to support their achievement. For additional examples and model language from jurisdictions in California, see [Example Model Goals, Objectives, and Policies and Programs from the California Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation](#).

LHDs play a crucial role in supporting these efforts by integrating health data into planning processes, advancing cross-sector collaboration, and ensuring policies prioritize equity.⁴ Strengthening implementation of environmental justice elements across jurisdictions creates an opportunity for LHDs to reduce environmental exposures, improve community conditions, and advance equitable health outcomes in communities across California.

LHD Roles

As **connectors**, LHDs can build and foster relationships between cross-sector partners such as planning agencies, community-based organizations, and residents affected by compounded health risks or living in disadvantaged communities. As **educators** and **experts**, they can simplify and communicate complex public health and environmental data, such as public health outcomes, environmental burdens, and cumulative effects, to decision-makers and community members. LHDs can also act as **evaluators** by supporting data collection, monitoring, and evaluation efforts.

Environmental Justice Elements in California General Plans: Mini Community Engagement Plan

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
	The role each partner can play across each phase of the planning process.		
Residents from Disadvantaged Communities	- Identify priorities and share lived experience. - Guide and inform the planning process.	- Participate in programs. - Co-lead initiatives. - Provide ongoing feedback.	- Assess outcomes. - Ensure policies reflect community needs.
Community-Based Organizations & Environmental Justice Advocacy Groups	- Identify community priorities. - Facilitate participation in the policy process. - Co-lead outreach.	- Mobilize residents. - Co-lead initiatives.	- Provide ongoing feedback. - Assess whether policies meet community needs.

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
	The role each partner can play across each phase of the planning process.		
Local Health Departments (LHDs)	• Provide health data. • Guide the drafting of nutrition and physical activity strategies in the environmental justice element.	• Lead interventions related to nutrition and physical activity. • Support community programs related to nutrition and physical activity.	• Track health outcomes. • Monitor disparities.
Planning & Zoning Departments	• Integrate environmental justice into land use plans. • Convene cross-sector partners to help guide the planning process.	• Create cross-sector workgroups to successfully achieve policy outcomes.	N/A
Academic Institutions & Research Centers	• Conduct assessments. • Provide evidence.	N/A	• Evaluate outcomes. • Produce recommendations.

Action Steps for LHDs

- Review [CalEnviroScreen](#) data and existing plans, policies, and workflows (e.g., community health assessments, health improvement plans).
- Develop and share resources that illustrate local environmental health inequities, such as data briefs, maps, and case studies.
- Partner with community-based organizations, residents, and planning agencies to codesign and execute the community engagement plan.
- Participate in development and update processes for the environmental justice element to ensure nutrition and physical activity goals are included.

Legal Considerations and Jurisdictional Authority

Beginning January 1, 2018, SB 1000 requires jurisdictions to adopt an environmental justice element when disadvantaged communities, as defined by state law, are present and the jurisdiction is concurrently updating two or more elements of its general plan.⁵ State law establishes the conditions under which this requirement is triggered, as well as the scope of authority for integrating environmental justice policies into local planning processes. Jurisdictions may rely on tools such as CalEnviroScreen, along with relevant local data, to identify disadvantaged communities consistent with state definitions.⁶ While adoption of an environmental justice element is not mandated in all circumstances, jurisdictions retain the authority to incorporate environmental justice goals and policies into their general plans at their discretion. The sequencing of general plan updates may also affect whether statutory requirements are triggered, which has implications for how and when jurisdictions exercise this authority.

Community Empowerment Strategies

Authentic and inclusive community engagement strategies are central to developing and implementing an actionable environmental justice element. LHDs and local government agencies should support strategies that elevate community leadership, invest in capacity building, and ensure residents have meaningful decision-making authority, not just opportunities for input. This includes valuing lived experience as expertise and removing barriers to participation through accessible, inclusive community engagement practices.⁷ For more information, see [The Planner's Playbook: A Community-Centered Approach to Improving Health & Equity from ChangeLab Solutions](#), which outlines strategies and best practices to center community voices and diverse perspectives in the planning process.⁸

Implementation Strategies

LHDs should embed environmental justice goals into existing plans and workflows to ensure alignment, coordination, and accountability across agencies. They can strengthen policy development and implementation by leveraging community relationships to support inclusive, community-led engagement throughout the planning process. Additionally, departments should use their data systems to guide decision-making, identify priority areas, and track progress through measurable indicators and transparent reporting. [ChangeLab Solutions' The Planner's Playbook:](#)

[A Community-Centered Approach to Improving Health & Equity](#) also highlights best practices for using an environmental justice element to advance community health and well-being.⁹

Anticipated Challenges

Agencies leading the development and implementation of environmental justice elements often encounter structural, institutional, and resource-related challenges. Many departments face staffing, funding, and time constraints that make it difficult to support robust and meaningful engagement. Therefore, lead agencies should partner with residents from disadvantaged communities and community-based organizations to codesign community engagement processes. They can also adopt internal policies that provide funding and support community-based organizations in implementing the community engagement plan.

References

- 1 General Plan Guidelines and Technical Advisories. CA Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation. Accessed April 17, 2026. lci.ca.gov/planning/general-plan/guidelines.html.
- 2 California State Legislature, *Senate Bill No. 1000: Land Use: General Plans: Safety and Environmental Justice*, 2015–2016 Regular Session, approved September 24, 2016, leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160SB1000.
- 3 California Office of the Attorney General, *Senate Bill 1000 (SB 1000) Environmental Justice in General Plans: Best Practices for California Cities and Counties* California Department of Justice. 2019. oag.ca.gov/system/files/media/sb-1000-best-practices-en.pdf.
- 4 ChangeLab Solutions. *How Public Health Can Support Climate Change Mitigation*. 2025. changelabsolutions.org/product/climate-action-plan-research.
- 5 California State Legislature, *Senate Bill No. 1000: Land Use: General Plans: Safety and Environmental Justice*, 2015–2016 Regular Session, approved September 24, 2016, leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160SB1000.
- 6 California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment. CalEnviroScreen. Accessed April 17, 2026. oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen.

- 7 ChangeLab Solutions, *The Planner's Playbook: A Community-Centered Approach to Improving Health & Equity*, 2020. changelabsolutions.org/product/planners-playbook.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *Ibid.*

Active Transportation

Active transportation can be an affordable and effective way for people to increase their physical activity because it can be integrated into daily activities such as commuting to school or work, running errands, or traveling for leisure. Research shows that physical activity reduces the risk of cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, breast cancer, colon cancer, obesity, depression, dementia, and mortality.¹ The following policies help make active transportation infrastructure safer and more accessible for road users of all ages and abilities, and ensure adequate and sustained funding for its construction and maintenance. For more information about Complete Streets and Vision Zero, see [ChangeLab Solutions' Strategies to Support Safe & Accessible Active Transportation](#). For examples of how local jurisdictions have funded their active transportation work, see our [Active Transportation Case Studies](#).

References

- 1 Fitch-Polse D, Agarwal S. *The benefits of active transportation interventions: A review of the evidence*. *Journal of Transport and Land Use*. 2025;18(1). Accessed April 3, 2026. doi.org/10.5198/jtlu.2025.2468.

Complete Streets

Complete Streets policies formally commit that a jurisdiction will fund, plan, construct, operate, and maintain streets so they are safe for users of all ages and abilities, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders. This can include language about prioritizing inclusive community engagement, investments in underserved neighborhoods, investments in areas with the greatest safety issues, or street improvements that serve priority populations facing the greatest active transportation disparities.^{1,2} Complete Streets policies can be adopted through a variety of policy formats, including resolutions, ordinances, and executive orders. [Smart Growth America developed a Complete Streets Policy Framework](#), which identifies ten key elements of a strong Complete Streets policy.

California's 2008 Complete Streets law ([AB 1358](#)) requires every locality to incorporate Complete Streets when they make substantive revisions to the circulation element of their general plan.

LHD Roles

Most of these efforts are spearheaded by city and county planning and transportation departments. In some cases, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) may have jurisdiction over some local arterial streets. However, LHDs can still support these efforts as **experts**. They can provide data, particularly pertaining to the long-term health benefits of active living and the role the built environment plays in achieving active living goals. LHDs can provide expert testimony at planning commission and city council hearings where decisions are being made about implementing active transportation policies such as biking infrastructure, Complete Streets policies, sidewalk standards and connectivity, and transit-oriented development and designs. LHD data can also be included in the Complete Streets policy itself to ensure commitments support equitable health outcomes. LHDs can also participate in advisory groups and task forces, review and provide feedback on drafts of the plans for Complete Streets projects, and help identify evaluation and monitoring metrics.

Action Steps for LHDs

The general steps for developing and adopting a Complete Streets policy are summarized below. For more information on these steps, see [ChangeLab Solutions' Strategies to Support Safe & Accessible Active Transportation](#).

- **Identify a broad set of partners and build a coalition.**
- **Determine the best policy format for your jurisdiction (e.g., resolution, ordinance).**
- **Consult local government partners and elected officials on the steps needed to adopt the policy in your jurisdiction.**
- **Draft the policy, referring to [Smart Growth America's Complete Streets Policy Framework](#) to help ensure it reflects the ten elements of a strong Complete Streets policy.**
- **Adopt the policy.**

Once the policy is adopted, it is important to also integrate it into other plans and policies – for example, the transportation element of general plans, bicycle and pedestrian master plans, climate action plans, zoning codes, Vision Zero action plans, and Safe Routes to School (SRTS) programs. These types of plans are updated on a regular basis (approximately every two to ten years) and provide opportunities to engage in the process to help ensure Complete Streets priorities are reflected in the plans.

Specific action steps that LHDs can take include:

- **Do a quick search on city, county, or regional planning agency websites to determine whether your jurisdiction already has a Complete Streets policy.**
 - **If there is a Complete Streets policy, reach out to planning and transportation partners to see if you can get involved with implementation. Additionally, check when the policy and related plans expire and proactively plan to get involved in the update process.**
 - **If there is not a Complete Streets policy, do some quick research or reach out to planning and transportation partners to gauge interest in adopting one or building momentum in other related efforts (e.g., Health in All Policies, social determinants of health workgroups).**
- **Consider how Complete Streets priorities can be integrated into community health assessments, Community Health Improvement Plans (CHIP), and other strategic planning documents.**

Implementation Considerations

After a Complete Streets policy is codified, implementation is sometimes slow to start or not fully completed, resulting in the benefits and burdens of active transportation infrastructure (or lack thereof) being unequally distributed in communities. This delay can occur for a variety of reasons, including funding constraints, staff capacity, or lack of leadership or political will. Strategies to ensure accountability and transparency in implementation include regularly reporting on progress and evaluation metrics, making reports publicly available, and establishing an advisory board or oversight committee that includes community members, decision-makers, and other partners to provide ongoing feedback.

Legal Considerations

Under California's 2008 Complete Streets law ([AB 1358](#)), every locality is required to adopt Complete Streets as part of substantive revisions to the circulation element of their general plan. Therefore, any major amendments to local Complete Streets policies must follow the process for general plan amendments under Cal. Gov't Code § 65350 et seq. However, policymakers may have discretion to adjust the implementation or enforcement of existing policies to prioritize certain areas or populations without needing to amend the general plan. For resources to help localities comply with AB 1358, see [ChangeLab Solutions' California Complete Streets Policies](#) resource collection.

Community Empowerment Strategies

Community members can participate in advisory groups and community engagement events throughout planning processes to voice their priorities and concerns and ensure they are reflected in Complete Streets policies and plans. It is important for policy and planning processes to use participatory approaches that center the lived experience of community members and to cocreate solutions with community members, decision-makers, and other partners.^{3,4}

Anticipated Challenges

The quality of the policy content and adequate funding are crucial to the successful implementation of Complete Streets. Many jurisdictions have a Complete Streets policy but still score low on the [Complete Streets Policy Evaluation Tool](#). This translates to inconsistency in implementation and mixed program outcomes. There are many

examples of success, but also many instances where low accountability, lack of momentum or funding for implementation, and unsafe streets that continue to be car-centric have curbed benefits.^{5, 6, 7}

Complete Streets: Mini Community Engagement Plan

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
	The role each partner can play across each phase of the policy process.		
Residents & Community Members	- Participate in coalitions and advisory groups to identify priorities and share lived experience. - Ensure community priorities and lived experience are reflected in the Complete Streets policy.	Participate in coalitions and advisory groups to hold planning and transportation partners accountable to Complete Streets commitments.	- Assess whether policies reflect community needs. - Identify unintended effects and needed adjustments.
Local Health Departments (LHDs)	- Participate in coalitions and advisory groups to ensure health priorities are reflected in the Complete Streets policy. - Share data to inform policy development.	- Review and provide feedback on drafts of the plans for Complete Streets projects. - Participate in coalitions and advisory groups to hold planning and transportation partners accountable to Complete Streets commitments.	- Help identify evaluation and monitoring metrics. - Contribute data to support evaluation, if relevant.

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
	The role each partner can play across each phase of the policy process.		
Local Government Planning & Transportation Departments	• Lead coalition building. • Lead policy drafting.	• Coordinate with other departments to integrate Complete Streets priorities into their plans and policies. • Adopt or develop design guidelines.	• Lead data collection and reporting processes.
State Government Planning & Transportation Departments (Governor's Office of Land Use & Climate Innovation & Caltrans)	• Participate in coalitions and advisory groups to provide a statewide perspective.	• Integrate Complete Streets priorities into state plans and policies. • Administer grants and other funding sources.	• Contribute data to support evaluation, if relevant.
Elected Officials	• Approve Complete Streets policies.	N/A	• Contribute data to support evaluation, if relevant.
Transportation Advocacy Groups, Community-Based Organizations, Community Development Groups, Disability Advocates, Health Care Partners, Real Estate Associations, & Public Safety Agencies	• Participate in coalitions and advisory groups to ensure organizational and community priorities around specific issues (e.g., pedestrian/cyclist issues, safety, environment) are reflected in the Complete Streets policy.	• Participate in coalitions and advisory groups to hold planning and transportation partners accountable to Complete Streets commitments.	• Contribute data to support evaluation, if relevant.

References

- 1 Smart Growth America. What are Complete Streets? Accessed April 3, 2026. smartgrowthamerica.org/programs-and-coalitions/national-complete-streets-coalition/about.
- 2 Federal Highway Administration. Complete Streets. Accessed April 3, 2026. [planning.dot.gov/planning/topic_complete_streets.aspx](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/topic_complete_streets.aspx).
- 3 Davis D, Meyer J, Wright M, Zykofsky P. *Participation Tools for Better Community Planning*. Civic Well; 2013. Accessed April 3, 2026. civicwell.org/civic-resources/participation-tools-for-better-community-planning.
- 4 ChangeLab Solutions. The Planner's Playbook: A Community-Centered Approach to Improving Health & Equity. 2020. changelabsolutions.org/product/planners-playbook.
- 5 Smart Growth America. *The Best Complete Streets Policies 2025*. 2025. Accessed April 3, 2026. smartgrowthamerica.org/signature-reports/best-complete-streets-findings.
- 6 Sanchez J. California Falls Behind on Complete Streets. *Cal Bike* blog. July 18, 2023. Accessed April 3, 2026. calbike.org/california-falls-behind-on-complete-streets.
- 7 Steuteville R. Complete streets: What went wrong? *Public Square* blog. November 5, 2024. Accessed April 3, 2026. cnu.org/publicsquare/2024/11/05/complete-streets-what-went-wrong.

Vision Zero

Vision Zero is a “strategy to eliminate all traffic fatalities and severe injuries, while increasing safe, healthy, equitable mobility for all.”¹ Vision Zero policies can be adopted through a variety of policy formats, including resolutions, ordinances, and executive orders. Vision Zero uses the Safe System approach, which is a human-centered approach to traffic safety that prioritizes the “use of vehicle or roadway design and operational changes rather than relying primarily on behavioral changes” to ensure safety.² The needs of all users – including pedestrians, bicyclists, older people, young people, and people with disabilities – are integrated into the transportation system, and the system anticipates human error and considers human injury tolerance to increase safety. The Safe System approach applies the following principles:^{3,4}

- **Traffic-related deaths and serious injuries in crashes are unacceptable.**
- **Humans make mistakes that are preventable.**
- **Humans are vulnerable.**
- **Responsibility for decreasing traffic-related deaths and severe injuries is shared by all road users.**
- **Safety requires road users, pedestrians, engineers, and other advocates to be proactive.**
- **Redundancy is a crucial component of a safe transportation system.**

LHD Roles

Most of these efforts are spearheaded by city and county planning and transportation departments. However, LHDs can still support these efforts as **experts**. They can provide data, particularly pertaining to the long-term health benefits of active living and the importance of safety in enabling active transportation. LHDs can provide expert testimony at planning commission and city council hearings where decisions are being made about implementing active transportation policies such as biking infrastructure, Vision Zero policies, sidewalk standards and connectivity, and transit-oriented development and designs. LHD data can also be included in the Vision Zero policy itself to ensure commitments support equitable health outcomes. LHDs can also participate in advisory groups and task forces, review and provide feedback on drafts of the action plan, supplement collision data with health data to help inform priorities, and help identify evaluation and monitoring metrics.

Action Steps for LHDs

The general steps for developing and adopting a Vision Zero policy are summarized below. For more information on these steps, see [ChangeLab Solutions' Strategies to Support Safe & Accessible Active Transportation](#).

- **Identify a diverse set of partners to build a coalition and identify potential champions.**
- **Establish a safety culture across professional agencies and in the community.**
- **Determine the best policy format (e.g., resolution, ordinance).**
- **Consult with local government partners and elected officials on the steps needed to adopt the policy in your jurisdiction.**
- **Draft the policy.**
- **Adopt the policy.**

Vision Zero policies usually commit to developing an action plan. The general steps for developing and adopting an action plan include:

- **Establish any necessary task forces or advisory groups.**
- **Analyze safety data to create a High-Injury Network.**
- **Identify priorities and key strategies.**
- **Adopt the action plan.**

Once the action plan is adopted, jurisdictions can begin planning, designing, and constructing projects identified within it. It is important to also integrate Vision Zero projects and priorities into other plans and policies – for example, transportation elements of general plans, bicycle and pedestrian master plans, climate action plans, zoning codes, SRTS programs, Complete Streets policies, and other planning efforts. These types of plans are updated on a regular basis (approximately every two to ten years) and provide opportunities to engage in the process to help ensure Vision Zero priorities are reflected in the plans. Finally, Vision Zero policies and action plans should be monitored and evaluated on a regular basis.

Specific action steps that LHDs can take include:

- **Do a quick search on city, county, or regional planning agency websites to determine whether your jurisdiction already has a Vision Zero policy.**
 - **If there is a Vision Zero policy, reach out to planning and transportation partners to see if you can get involved with implementation. Additionally, check when the policy and related plans expire and proactively plan to get involved in the update process.**
 - **If there is not a Vision Zero policy, do some quick research or reach out to planning and transportation partners to gauge interest in adopting one or building momentum in other related efforts (e.g., Health in All Policies, social determinants of health workgroups, SRTS programs).**
- **Consider how Vision Zero priorities can be integrated into community health assessments, CHIPs, and other strategic planning documents.**

Implementation Considerations

It is important to ensure Vision Zero policies are enforced equitably so they do not create or exacerbate health or racial inequities or disparities. For example, speed management and enforcement of traffic laws are effective strategies for improving road safety and are often used in Vision Zero plans and policies. Strategies like automated speed cameras or traffic stops can help with speed management but can also result in racial disparities if implemented inequitably. There are many strategies to ensure Vision Zero policies are implemented and enforced equitably. For more guidance, see [BikeWalkKC and Safe Routes Partnership's Taking on Traffic Laws: A How-To Guide for Decriminalizing Mobility \(PDF\)](#) and [Vision Zero Network's Fair Warnings: Recommendations to Promote Equity in Speed Safety Camera Programs \(PDF\)](#).

Legal Considerations

State and federal legal requirements, including regulations and preemptive laws, may affect policy design, enforcement, procedures for conducting task forces and advisory groups, or street and speed design. Although state law does not currently preempt local jurisdictions from implementing Vision Zero, it is important to monitor new state and federal laws for preemption clauses affecting local policies.

Community Empowerment Strategies

Community members can participate in advisory groups and community engagement events throughout planning processes to voice their priorities and concerns and ensure they are reflected in Vision Zero policies and plans. It is important for policy and planning processes to use participatory approaches that center the lived experience of community members and to cocreate solutions with community members, decision-makers, and other partners.^{5, 6}

Anticipated Challenges

Measuring progress in terms of traffic collisions, fatalities, and severe injuries can be slow – or sometimes opposite of the goal – and jurisdictions have had varying levels of success over the last ten years. This can be discouraging; however, some early-adopter jurisdictions have seen gradual success where direct investments in infrastructure, Safe System approaches, and internal institutional changes were made.⁷

Vision Zero: Mini Community Engagement Plan

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
The role each partner can play across each phase of the policy process.			
Residents & Community Members	• Participate in coalitions and advisory groups to identify priorities and share lived experience. • Ensure community priorities and lived experience are reflected in the Vision Zero policy.	• Participate in coalitions and advisory groups to hold planning and transportation partners accountable to Vision Zero commitments.	• Assess whether policies reflect community needs. • Identify unintended effects and needed adjustments.

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
	The role each partner can play across each phase of the policy process.		
Local Health Departments (LHDs)	- Participate in coalitions and advisory groups to ensure health priorities are reflected in the Vision Zero policy. - Share data to inform policy development.	- Review and provide feedback on drafts of the action plan. - Review and provide feedback on drafts of other plans that include Vision Zero projects. - Participate in coalitions and advisory groups to hold planning and transportation partners accountable to Vision Zero commitments.	- Help identify evaluation and monitoring metrics. - Contribute data to support evaluation, if relevant.
Local Government Planning & Transportation Departments	- Lead coalition building. - Lead policy drafting.	- Lead development of the action plan. - Coordinate with other departments to integrate Vision Zero priorities into their plans and policies.	Lead the data collection and reporting process.
Other Local Government Departments (e.g., Parks & Recreation)	Participate in coalitions and advisory groups.	- Integrate Vision Zero priorities into department plans and policies. - Participate in coalitions and advisory groups.	Contribute data to support evaluation, if relevant.

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
	The role each partner can play across each phase of the policy process.		
State Government Departments (e.g., Planning, Transportation, Parks & Recreation)	Participate in coalitions and advisory groups to provide a statewide perspective.	- Integrate Vision Zero priorities into state-level plans and policies. - Administer grants and other funding sources.	Contribute data to support evaluation, if relevant.
Elected Officials	Approve the Vision Zero policy.	N/A	Contribute data to support evaluation, if relevant.
Transit Agencies	Participate in coalitions and advisory groups to ensure transit priorities are reflected in the Vision Zero policy.	- Participate in coalitions and advisory groups to hold planning and transportation partners accountable to Vision Zero commitments. - Integrate Vision Zero priorities into transit agency plans and policies.	Contribute data to support evaluation, if relevant.
Bicycle & Pedestrian Advocacy Groups, Advocates for Families of Victims of Traffic Violence, Parent Groups, & Local Businesses	Participate in coalitions and advisory groups to ensure organizational and community priorities around specific issues (e.g., pedestrian/ cyclist issues, safety, environment) are reflected in the Vision Zero policy.	Participate in coalitions and advisory groups to hold planning and transportation partners accountable to Vision Zero commitments.	Contribute data to support evaluation, if relevant.

References

- 1 Vision Zero Network. What is Vision Zero? Accessed May 19, 2026. visionzeronetwork.org/about/what-is-vision-zero.
- 2 Institute of Transportation Engineers. Safe System. Accessed April 3, 2026. ite.org/technical-resources/topics/safe-systems.
- 3 The Safe System Approach. Washington, DC: Federal Highway Administration, US Department of Transportation; 2017. Accessed April 3, 2026. highways.dot.gov/sites/fhwa.dot.gov/files/2022-06/FHWA_SafeSystem_Brochure_V9_508_200717.pdf.
- 4 ChangeLab Solutions. *Vision Zero Implementation Toolkit*. 2022. changelabsolutions.org/product/vision-zero-model-resolution-and-toolkit.
- 5 Davis D, Meyer J, Wright M, Zykofsky P. Participation Tools for Better Community Planning. Civic Well; 2013. Accessed April 3, 2026. civicwell.org/civic-resources/participation-tools-for-better-community-planning.
- 6 ChangeLab Solutions. The Planner's Playbook: A Community-Centered Approach to Improving Health & Equity. 2020. changelabsolutions.org/product/planners-playbook.
- 7 Smith T. A Decade of Vision Zero: Gauging Progress & Barriers. *Vision Zero Network* blog. November 6, 2025. Accessed April 3, 2026. visionzeronetwork.org/a-decade-of-vz-gauging-progress-and-barriers.

Other Active Transportation Funding Programs

Adequate, sustained funding is an important aspect of building and maintaining active transportation infrastructure. At the state and local levels, active transportation can be funded through a variety of sources, including transportation bonds, allocations from municipality general funds, voter-approved taxes and levies, revenues from fines, vehicle registration fees, gas taxes, and grants. These funding sources can be created through a variety of mechanisms and vary across states and local jurisdictions. Potential mechanisms include legislation, voter approval, council approval, and allocation of the general fund. Funding can be used to support both planning processes and infrastructure projects identified in plans. Local jurisdictions often use a combination of local, state, and federal funds to support their active transportation work. Sales taxes are more commonly implemented at the local level,¹ but some states – including California, Illinois, Kansas, and Missouri – do have one.²

In California, the main grant programs that fund active transportation are the [Active Transportation Program](#) (ATP) and [Local Highway Safety Improvement Program](#) (HSIP), administered by [Caltrans](#); the [Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program](#) (TIRCP), administered by the [California State Transportation Agency](#) (CalSTA); the [Local Partnership Program](#), administered by the [California Transportation Commission](#) (CTC); the [Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation \(EEM\) Grant Program](#), administered by the [California Natural Resources Agency](#); and the [Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities \(AHSC\) Program](#), administered by the [California Department of Housing and Community Development](#).

LHD Roles

LHDs can act as **experts** to support policy analysis research by providing health data and articulating the effects of active transportation on physical activity, air quality, and chronic disease. This can help decision-makers, influencers, and voters understand the importance of active transportation and support funding for it. LHDs can also offer their expertise by participating in coalitions, advisory groups, and committees. Additionally, as trusted messengers, LHDs can act as **educators** or **amplifiers** to support public awareness campaigns, voter outreach, communications and messaging, and political will campaigns for funding mechanisms that require voter approval.

Action Steps for LHDs

- **Build or strengthen relationships with planning and transportation partners to support efforts, such as grant applications and implementation or campaigns to pass voter-approved funding mechanisms.**
- **Identify when existing funding mechanisms (e.g., sales taxes, levies) are scheduled to expire and proactively plan to get involved in the renewal process.**
- **Share data on the health effects of active transportation to help make the case for additional funding, as well as data on health disparities to inform how funding should be prioritized.**

Implementation Considerations

Funding can be allocated or prioritized for specific populations or geographic areas that have historically or currently experience inequities or disinvestment in active transportation infrastructure and services. Incorporating this consideration in the early phases of designing the funding source or grant application helps ensure an equitable process and outcome.

Legal Considerations

The state legislature has authority to increase and maintain funding appropriations for these programs. Any new programs should be aligned with existing state law. At the local level, the city council, city commission, board of supervisors, or common council may need to approve funding sources such as sales taxes, levies, or budget allocations.

Community Empowerment Strategies

Community members can be involved in developing expenditure plans for funds from taxes, bonds, and levies to ensure decisions reflect their needs and priorities. They can also participate in advisory groups and committees to guide the ongoing spending of funds and to encourage accountability and transparency in local government. There are also many ways that community members can be engaged in other transportation planning efforts (e.g., community workshops, surveys, public comment) to help advocate for more funding or provide input on how funding is used.

Anticipated Challenges

Limited funding and competing priorities can make allocating adequate and sustained funding for active transportation challenging. Balancing roadway space between different modes of transportation (e.g., motorized vs. active) can also pose challenges when it comes to deciding how to prioritize and allocate available funding. Further, grant applications and reporting requirements can be burdensome for smaller or less resourced communities.

Other Active Transportation Funding Programs: Mini Community Engagement Plan

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
	The role each partner can play across each phase of the policy process.		
Residents & Community Members	• Participate in coalitions and advisory groups to identify priorities and share lived experience. • Ensure community priorities and lived experience are reflected in expenditure plans, grant applications, and other funding allocations.	• Participate in advisory groups and oversight committees to provide continuous feedback on implementation.	• Assess whether policies reflect community needs. • Identify unintended effects and needed adjustments.
Local Health Departments (LHDs)	• Participate in coalitions and advisory groups to ensure health priorities are reflected in expenditure plans, grant applications, and other funding allocations. • Share data to inform funding decisions.	• Participate in advisory groups and oversight committees to provide continuous feedback on implementation.	• Help identify evaluation and monitoring metrics. • Contribute data to support evaluation, if relevant.

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
	The role each partner can play across each phase of the policy process.		
Local Government Planning & Transportation Departments	• Inform how funding should be prioritized. • Lead the grant application process.	• Use funding to build and maintain active transportation infrastructure.	• Lead the data collection and reporting process.
State Government Planning & Transportation Departments (Governor's Office of Land Use & Climate Innovation & Caltrans)	• Administer state-level grants. • Distribute federal funding to localities.	N/A	• Contribute data to support evaluation, if relevant.
Elected Officials	• Approve funding sources and allocations, when relevant.	N/A	N/A
Advocacy Groups & Community-Based Organizations	• Organize and mobilize community members to support voter-approved funding sources. • Participate in advisory groups to ensure community priorities and lived experience are reflected in expenditure plans, grant applications, and other funding allocations.	• Participate in advisory groups and oversight committees to provide continuous feedback on implementation.	• Contribute data to support evaluation, if relevant.

References

- 1 Center for Innovative Finance Support. Local Revenue. Federal Highway Administration. Accessed March 27, 2026. [fhwa.dot.gov/ipd/value_capture/traditional_transportation_revenue/local.aspx](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ipd/value_capture/traditional_transportation_revenue/local.aspx).
- 2 Center for Innovative Finance Support. Frequently Asked Questions – Transportation Sales Tax Districts. Federal Highway Administration. Accessed March 27, 2026. [fhwa.dot.gov/ipd/value_capture/defined/faq_transportation_sales_tax_districts.aspx](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ipd/value_capture/defined/faq_transportation_sales_tax_districts.aspx).

Food Retail Environment

Excessive consumption of foods and beverages with high amounts of salt, sugar, and other harmful ingredients can increase risk of chronic health conditions such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease.¹ Food retail environments strongly influence health behaviors and include businesses such as restaurants, cafeterias, markets, street food outlets, online grocery, and convenience stores.² A healthy food retail environment promotes and encourages the purchase and consumption of healthy foods.³ It also places reasonable controls on unhealthy foods and beverages to help community members make healthy choices.⁴ The following policies help promote healthier food environments by placing restrictions on unhealthy food options and shaping consumer purchasing decisions in food retail environments.

References

- 1 John S, Johnson J, Nelms A, Bresnahan C, Tucker AC, Wolfson JA. Recommendations to Promote Healthy Retail Food Environments: Key Federal Policy Opportunities for the Farm Bill. Center for Science In the Public Interest. 2023. Available at: cspinet.org/resource/report-title-recommendations-promote-healthy-retail-food-environments.
- 2 Scapin T, Boelsen-Robinson T, Naughton S, et al. A best practice guide for conducting healthy food retail research: A resource for researchers and health promotion practitioners. *Obes Rev*. 2025;26(4):e13870. doi:10.1111/obr.13870.
- 3 ChangeLab Solutions. Healthy Retail Playbook. June 2016. Accessed April 29, 2026. changelabsolutions.org/product/healthy-retail-set-tools-policy-partnership.
- 4 *Ibid.*

Healthy Checkout

In the United States, children and adult populations continue to experience increased risk for type 2 diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and other chronic conditions.¹ One factor in these increased rates is the unhealthy food retail environment, which promotes ultra-processed foods and beverages with high fat, sugar, and salt contents.² The promotion of these products includes influencing behaviors that affect food choices, such as the placement of products within food retail environments.³ Checkout areas in food retail establishments (e.g., full-service groceries, convenience stores, dollar stores) often have shelves promoting convenience foods and snacks directly adjacent to the register. These areas have been designed by retailers to optimize impulse purchases, especially as consumers are waiting in line.⁴ A national survey in 2021 found that over one-third of adults reported buying a food or beverage item found in the checkout area during their last visit to the grocery store.⁵

Healthy checkout policies set nutrition standards for the products sold in checkout areas.⁶ These standards can regulate the nutrition profile of individual products sold in this area or the percentage of storewide retail space that must be dedicated to nutrient-rich foods and beverages, or they can prohibit the sale of SSBs or ultra-processed foods.⁷ A healthy checkout policy can be implemented through a city ordinance. As of March 2026, two California cities – Berkeley and Perris – and one county, Contra Costa, have implemented mandatory healthy checkout ordinances.^{8,9}

Research has demonstrated that healthy checkout policies have been linked to improvements in the nutrition profile of foods sold in the checkout area of stores.¹⁰ A 2025 study assessing the impact of the world's first mandatory healthy checkout policy in Berkeley, California, found the policy reduced the amount of added sugar, fat, and sodium per serving of foods and beverages sold in the checkout area and increased fiber per serving one year post-implementation.¹¹ Additionally, approximately 83% of stores in Berkeley were compliant with the ordinance.¹² Further studies are needed to evaluate the policy's effect on consumers' dietary choices and, by extension, metabolic health indicators such as high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes.

LHD Roles

LHDs can act as **educators** by leading community engagement efforts to educate food retailers, residents, and local government agencies on the health effects of ultra-processed foods and SSBs. They can also provide evidence of the efficacy of healthy checkout policies in reducing unhealthy impulse purchases at checkout. As **experts**, LHDs can collaborate with other local government divisions and health departments to provide additional guidance and case studies on the most effective approaches and standards for healthy checkout implementation and enforcement to inform policies and procedures.

LHDs can also act as **connectors** by leading county- or citywide workgroups to help local government agencies, legislators, community organizers, community-based organizations, and trade associations connect around balancing economic and health concerns related to the implementation of healthy checkout policies. As **amplifiers**, LHDs can support partners' advocacy efforts for the implementation of healthy checkout policies, highlighting the success of Perris and Berkeley.

Healthy Checkout: Mini Community Engagement Plan

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
The role each partner can play across each phase of the planning process.			
Residents & Community Members	- Identify priorities and share lived experience of food environments. - Provide input to guide and inform the planning process.	- Participate in policy development, including enforcement and compliance plans. - Co-lead community advocacy initiatives. - Provide ongoing feedback.	Ensure policies reflect community needs.

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
	The role each partner can play across each phase of the planning process.		
Community-Based Organizations & Advocacy Groups	• Serve as food policy experts. • Facilitate discussions about needs, concerns, and challenges of healthy checkout policies. • Co-lead education and outreach on healthy checkout policies.	• Mobilize residents to advocate for implementation. • Co-lead community advocacy initiatives.	• Provide feedback on policies' impact on the local food environment. • Assess whether policies meet community needs.
Local Health Departments (LHDs)	• Provide data on local food environments and community populations. • Support interdisciplinary and cross-sector collaboration on balancing economic and health interests. • Identify strong evidence for and success stories of local ordinances.	• Support community engagement. • Provide technical assistance to food retailers. • Share local policy implementation success stories.	• Track health outcomes and health behaviors. • Monitor disparities in food environments, compliance, and enforcement. • Provide robust community data to demonstrate successes and highlight challenges to implementation.

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
The role each partner can play across each phase of the planning process.			
Food Retailers & Food Trade Associations	- Identify economic and business concerns. - Provide insight into policies' impact on food retailers, food manufacturers, and distributors. - Provide insight into possible healthy alternatives, qualifying entities, and products.	- Maintain balance between business and health concerns. - Provide educational materials to inform businesses of new policies, standards, and compliance requirements.	Track policies' economic and business impact on food retailers, trade associations, manufacturers, and distributors.

Action Steps for LHDs

- **Identify successful local healthy checkout ordinances and tailor them to the needs of your community.**
- **Clearly define eligible stores, checkout areas, and nutritional standards that reflect the needs and culture of the community.¹³**
- **Collaborate with experienced food policy innovators to ensure successful implementation of healthy checkout policies.¹⁴**
- **Establish workgroups of community members, local governments, community-based organizations, well-funded trade associations, and food and beverage manufacturers to anticipate and work through any industry pushback.**

Additional step-by-step processes for implementing a local healthy checkout policy can be found in the [Center for Science in the Public Interest's Roadmap and Tool Kit for a Healthy Checkout Ordinance \(PDF\)](#). ChangeLab Solutions' 2017 Healthy Checkout Workshop in Oakland, California, and [Model Healthy Checkout Aisle Ordinance](#) are both referenced in the toolkit.

Legal Considerations

There are no state laws in California that prohibit healthy checkout regulations or standards. The implementation of healthy checkout policies is mainly the responsibility of local governments.

Community Empowerment Strategies

To ensure the policy is well supported by community members and does not have disproportionate negative effects on some groups, it is important to use community engagement strategies that partner with stakeholders who would likely be affected by such a policy. These stakeholders can be included in advisory groups to help guide policy priorities and provide culturally relevant considerations. Additionally, early coalition building between local community-based organizations, city governments, advocates, and non-governmental organizations (NGO) is key to advancing healthy checkout policies.¹⁵

Examples of advisory and coalition building partners include:

- **Food retailers (e.g., grocers, convenience store owners, big-box retailers, dollar stores)**
- **Residents representing diverse demographic backgrounds**
- **Food justice and hunger advocacy groups**
- **Health care providers (e.g., medical professional organizations, hospitals)**
- **Public health organizations (e.g., institutes of health, condition-specific organizations such as the American Heart Association or American Diabetes Association)**
- **Parent groups (e.g., school board committees)**

Implementation Strategies

Communities of color and low-income communities are more likely to live in unhealthy food environments and food deserts, where one grocery or convenience store may be the only food source within city limits.¹⁶ Additionally, neighborhoods in Berkeley that had higher rates of poverty, lower educational attainment, and larger Black and Hispanic populations were less likely to meet healthy checkout standards.¹⁷ Healthy checkout policies should be carefully crafted to increase nutrition equity without further burdening these communities.

It is important to consider the health inequity implications of any exemptions to healthy checkout policies. For example, in Berkeley, stores smaller than 2,500 square feet, including corner and convenience stores, are currently exempt. This can create health inequities in neighborhoods that rely on convenience stores for food access.¹⁸

Healthy checkout standards should focus on clearly identifiable foods that are allowed or prohibited, rather than nutrition-based thresholds that require reading labels for enforcement. For example, they could prohibit chips and chocolate in checkout areas instead of allowing select reformulated versions.

Healthy checkout policies should be designed to apply to all retailers to maximize impact and minimize confusion among retailers and enforcement officials. If adopting this approach, enforcement design should include scaled fines based on retailer size to avoid disproportionately penalizing small businesses.

Including provisions that automatically trigger education and technical assistance following a violation, along with a clearly defined timeline for follow-up compliance checks, helps ensure compliance and enforcement are timely and standardized.

Providing support to retailers navigating cooperative marketing agreements with food and beverage companies – especially when those agreements conflict with healthy checkout standards – can be key to ensuring proper implementation. Retailers may need help identifying compliant product lines (e.g., unsweetened sparkling water vs. SSBs) and communicating necessary changes to suppliers. Jurisdictions should create user-friendly and accessible materials to support retailers, including step-by-step guidance, FAQs, and lists of approved products within common categories. This information should be available online and provided through optional educational sessions for store managers.

Additionally, by including provisions for evaluation and ongoing data collection to inform policy adaptations and assess changes in retail practices, food environments, consumer behavior, and health outcomes, localities and their partners can track any negative or positive outcomes associated with implementation of the policy.

Identifying and implementing structured enforcement practice and collaborative compliance measures are key to ensuring successful alignment with policy outcomes. For example, the Berkeley healthy checkout model includes a structured inspection and review process that involves the city's environmental health and

public health divisions. This approach to enforcement ensures health expertise with regulatory oversight.

Compliance may slip with turnover in store managers, which is expected. Ongoing engagement should include educational sessions, regularly updated resources, and information gathering sessions to identify emerging implementation challenges.

Anticipated Challenges

After the city council vote in Berkeley, the City received letters of opposition from beverage and snack food associations requesting that certain additional products (e.g., SSBs, processed meat) be permitted in checkout areas.¹⁹ Perris also received industry pushback after implementation, with industry associations arguing the policy would result in loss of revenue and jobs, hinder chains' development plans, and unfairly target grocery stores. They also stated that the nutritional standards were confusing.²⁰ Localities should anticipate some similar industry pushback.

References

- 1 Falbe J, Marinello S, Wolf EC, et al. Food and Beverage Environments at Store Checkouts in California: Mostly Unhealthy Products. *Curr Dev Nutr*. 2023;7(6):100075. Published 2023 Apr 15. doi:10.1016/j.cdnut.2023.100075.
- 2 *Ibid*.
- 3 *Ibid*.
- 4 Falbe, Jennifer, Justin S. White, et al. "The potential for healthy checkout policies to advance nutrition equity." *Nutrients* 13, no. 11 (2021): 4181.
- 5 *Ibid*.
- 6 Center for Science in the Public Interest. Health checkout frequently asked questions. October 2023. Accessed March 30, 2026. cspi.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/CSPI_healthyCheckoutFAQ.pdf.
- 7 Falbe J, Marinello S, Wolf EC, Solar S, Powell LM. Food Environment After Implementation of a Healthy Checkout Policy. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2024;7(8):e2421731. Published 2024 Aug 1. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.21731.
- 8 Hageaars LL, Schmidt LA, Falbe J. Enacting healthy checkout policies: lessons from Berkeley and Perris, California. *Public Health Nutr*. 2025;28(1):e196. Published 2025 Nov 7. doi:10.1017/S1368980025101420.

- 9 Gardner K. Contra Costa County, CA, advances nation's first county-level healthy checkout policy. Center for Science in the Public Interest. Updated September 17, 2025. Accessed March 30, 2026. cspi.org/statement/contra-costa-county-ca-advances-nations-first-county-level-healthy-checkout-policy.
- 10 Falbe J, Marinello S, Wolf EC, Solar S, Powell LM. Food Environment After Implementation of a Healthy Checkout Policy. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2024;7(8):e2421731. Published 2024 Aug 1. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.21731.
- 11 Reimold AE, Wolf EC, Matas KJG, et al. Impacts of a Healthy Checkout Ordinance on Added Sugars, Sodium, and Other Nutrients at Checkout 1 Year After Implementation: Berkeley, California, 2021-2022. *Am J Public Health*. 2025;115(10):1700-1712. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2025.308159.
- 12 Falbe J, Marinello S, Wolf EC, Solar S, Powell LM. Food Environment After Implementation of a Healthy Checkout Policy. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2024;7(8):e2421731. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.21731.
- 13 Hagenaars LL, Schmidt LA, Falbe J. Enacting healthy checkout policies: lessons from Berkeley and Perris, California. *Public Health Nutr*. 2025;28(1):e196. Published 2025 Nov 7. doi:10.1017/S1368980025101420.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 Marinello S, Powell L, and Falbe J. More Unhealthy Products Promoted at Checkouts in Disadvantaged Neighborhoods. Center for Poverty & Inequality Research Policy Brief. 12(8). April 2024. Accessed March 30, 2026. poverty.ucdavis.edu/post/more-unhealthy-products-promoted-checkouts-disadvantaged-neighborhoods.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 The City of Berkeley. Berkeley Healthy Checkout: Informational Packet July 2024. Accessed March 30, 2026. berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/legislative-body-meeting-attachments/2024-07-29%20ITEM%2004%20HEALTHY%20CHECKOUT%20SUPPLEMENTAL%20MATERIAL.pdf.
- 19 Hagenaars LL, Schmidt LA, Falbe J. Enacting healthy checkout policies: lessons from Berkeley and Perris, California. *Public Health Nutr*. 2025;28(1):e196. Published 2025 Nov 7. doi:10.1017/S1368980025101420.
- 20 *Ibid.*

Sugar-Sweetened Beverage (SSB) Taxes

SSB excise taxes can be implemented as a government strategy to curb high sugar consumption and address increasing rates of obesity, type 2 diabetes, and other chronic conditions. An excise tax is generally defined as a “specific type of tax that is levied on certain goods or services at the time of their purchase.”¹ Unlike sales taxes, which are charged directly to consumers, excise taxes are usually charged to the business selling a product.² Many states charge a sales tax on purchases that include SSBs, but the tax is usually too small to change buying habits.³ Sales taxes also often apply to other types of beverages and are added at checkout, after people decide what to buy.⁴ Excise taxes are different because they raise the price on the shelf, so shoppers see the cost before choosing what to buy. After distributors pay the tax, they often pass the cost on to retailers through higher prices, and retailers then raise shelf prices so shoppers see the cost before choosing what to buy.

Currently, only eight cities and counties have enacted SSB excise taxes through local ordinances, though several additional cities are considering legislation. Policy approaches typically focus on two primary tax types: nutrition-based and category-based.⁵ Nutrition-based taxes apply to foods with poor nutritional quality, such as those high in sugar, while category-based taxes focus on specific products, such as SSBs. A 2025 study of SSB tax policies around the world found that these taxes were linked to reduced SSB consumption and lower overall sugar intake.⁶ They were also associated with lower obesity rates and body mass index, improved oral health, and better pregnancy and birth outcomes.⁷ Another study examining several US cities that have implemented SSB excise taxes found that retail prices of SSBs increased by 33.1% over two years post-implementation in the cities, and there was a 33% decrease in SSB purchases over the same time period.⁸ SSB excise taxes can be a useful strategy to promote healthy beverage options, while generating tax revenue that can be invested back into the community. At the time of publication, four California cities have levied SSB taxes – Albany, Berkeley, Oakland, and San Francisco – however, the state passed legislation in 2018 banning any new locality from establishing a tax for twelve years.⁹

In a community-led effort, Santa Cruz decided to move forward with a new SSB tax, despite the prohibition and risk of an extreme penalty. Santa Cruz residents voted to adopt the SSB tax, Measure Z, in November 2024.¹⁰ The measure passed despite the beverage industry spending over \$1 million to oppose the ballot.¹¹ In response, the

beverage industry filed a lawsuit challenging Santa Cruz’s tax under the preemption law.¹² Litigation in this case still pending at the time of publication. If the litigation is decided in favor of Santa Cruz and local authority, charter cities in California would be completely free to adopt new SSB taxes.

LHD Roles

As **educators**, LHDs can help inform the public and policymakers about the health and economic benefits of implementing local SSB excise taxes. By doing this, LHDs could support the passage of new ordinances and help expand SSB taxes across California. These efforts can use existing local SSB policy examples to show how SSB taxes can generate revenue for public health and safety programs. LHDs can also act as **connectors** by leading county- or citywide workgroups to help local government agencies, legislators, community organizers, and vendors connect around balancing economic and health concerns related to SSB excise taxes. For example, workgroups could brainstorm different economic strategies to address the concerns of vendors and health officials.

Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Taxes: Mini Community Engagement Plan

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
The role each partner can play across each phase of the planning process.			
Residents & Community Members	- Identify priorities and share lived experience of food environments. - Provide input to guide and inform the planning process. - Provide insight into the allocation of SSB tax revenue.	- Participate in policy development. - Co-lead community advocacy initiatives. - Provide ongoing feedback regarding challenges and setbacks. - Provide testimony at city or county council meetings.	Ensure policies reflect community needs and food environments.

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
	The role each partner can play across each phase of the planning process.		
Community-Based Organizations & Advocacy Groups	• Serve as food policy experts. • Facilitate discussions about needs, concerns, and challenges. • Provide insight into the allocation of SSB tax revenue. • Review existing SSB ordinances to inform policy development.	• Mobilize residents to advocate for implementation. • Co-lead community advocacy initiatives. • Co-lead education and outreach.	• Provide feedback on policies' impact on the local food environment. • Assess whether policies meet community needs.
Local Health Departments (LHDs)	• Provide data on local food environments and community populations. • Support interdisciplinary and cross-sector collaboration on balancing economic and health interests. • Identify and review strong evidence supporting health outcomes and community impact. • Review existing SSB ordinances to inform policy development.	• Support community engagement. • Provide technical assistance to food retailers. • Share local policy implementation success stories.	• Track health outcomes and health behaviors. • Evaluate and monitor policies' impact on food retailers. • Provide robust community data to demonstrate successes and highlight challenges to implementation.

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
The role each partner can play across each phase of the planning process.			
Food Retailers & Food Trade Associations	- Identify economic and business concerns. - Provide insight into policies' impact on food retailers, food manufacturers, and distributors. - Provide insight into possible healthy alternatives, qualifying entities, and products.	- Maintain balance between business and health concerns. - Provide educational materials to inform local businesses of new policies, standards, and compliance requirements.	Track policies' economic and business impact on food retailers, trade associations, manufacturers, and distributors.

Action Steps for LHDs

[ChangeLab Solutions' Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Taxes Case Studies](#) provide several action steps LHDs can take to implement SSB tax policies, including:

- **Identify and evaluate different SSB excise tax strategies, such as taxing beverages based on liquid volume or sugar content.**
- **Reach out to local policymakers and stakeholders to collaborate on tax rates, qualifying beverages, local preemption, and other tax or health considerations.**
- **Assess potential unintended consequences of implementing SSB excise taxes and identify mitigation strategies to support equitable implementation.** For example, SSB excise taxes can disproportionately burden lower income residents, who would end up paying a larger portion of their household income if they purchase taxed beverages.¹³
- **Ensure revenue is directed toward community-led efforts to invest in health.**¹⁴ For example, in Berkeley, SSB tax revenue has been allocated to school and community programs designed to promote healthy eating and prevent type 2 diabetes and obesity in low-income communities and communities of color.¹⁵
- **Consider the positive and negative consequences of a general-purpose tax versus a special-purpose tax.**

- **Ensure early community input and engagement in determining the allocation of revenue funds, as well as public accountability.¹⁶ This could involve developing a city council-appointed expert panel or a community commission board that reflects the demographics of the community.¹⁷ Research has demonstrated that community-led reinvestment as a result of tax revenue has led to improvements in community health.¹⁸ Research has also confirmed that SSB taxes can be an equitable public policy, with evaluations of existing taxes showing that reinvestment of tax revenues has resulted in a progressive transfer of funding toward low-income communities.¹⁹**

Additionally, [ChangeLab Solutions' Model Local Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Distribution Tax Ordinance](#) provides sample language for localities looking to implement their own SSB ordinance.

Legal Considerations

In 2018, beverage industry efforts led to a law preempting charter cities in California from passing new SSB taxes until January 1, 2031.²⁰ The California legislature enacted the law under the threat of an industry-funded state ballot initiative that, if passed, would have drastically curtailed local governments' ability to raise revenue for critical services like public health, education, and transportation.²¹

General-Purpose Versus Special-Purpose Taxes. A key decision in designing tax legislation is whether to propose a general-purpose tax or a special-purpose tax, which ultimately determines how the tax revenue can be distributed. For a general-purpose tax, revenue can be used for any legitimate purpose,²² whereas revenue for a special-purpose tax must be allocated for the specific designated purpose.²³ The majority of new taxes proposed at the local level in California must receive voter approval; therefore, policymakers should consider both the potential revenue implications and voting thresholds for each type of tax. For example, funds from general-purpose taxes may be directed away from community health. Additionally, policymakers should center the most affected communities when allocating revenue generated by SSB taxes and in designing the tax.²⁴

Voting Requirements for Local Tax Legislation in California ²⁵		
Jurisdiction	Tax Type	Approval Threshold
County	General-purpose tax	Two-thirds of the board of supervisors and a majority of voters
	Special-purpose tax (expenditure plan required)	Two-thirds of the board of supervisors and two-thirds of voters
City	General-purpose tax	Two-thirds of city council and a majority of voters
	Special-purpose tax (expenditure plan required)	Two-thirds of city council and two-thirds of voters

Community Empowerment Strategies

Similar to the *Berkeley vs. Big Soda* campaign,²⁶ community empowerment efforts could focus on collaboration and endorsements from community stakeholders from different sectors to garner support from state legislators and other political leaders.²⁷ They should also focus on developing a strong evidence base to support the implementation of SSB taxes and combat industry interference in local communities.²⁸

Community members who will be affected by the tax should play a prominent role in influencing the tax proposal and design to ensure their interconnected social, economic, and health concerns are addressed. Community input also helps decision-makers minimize unintended negative consequences that the tax may have on community members. One strategy for engaging community members is to use community advisory boards to help advocate for and ensure equitable outcomes. For example, a community advisory board or a local food policy council could make funding recommendations to the taxing municipality, ensure public accountability, and provide suggestions for qualifying SSB products.

Changemakers should ensure that, barring legal constraints, SSB tax revenue is directed to communities disproportionately harmed by SSB marketing and consumption. Funds can be allocated for programs and services that address locally relevant health issues, such as improving access to preschool and early learning programs or supporting equitable K–12 education outcomes. Reinvestment of tax revenue should reflect the issues identified as most important by the communities bearing the brunt of the tax burden.

Implementation Strategies

As mentioned in the action steps, assessing potential unintended consequences of implementing SSB excise taxes and identifying mitigation strategies helps ensure equitable implementation. Local policymakers should also consider health and equity implications when allocating SSB tax revenue.

Identifying possible areas where technical assistance and education are needed across local entities can help ensure retailers remain in compliance with SSB taxes. After these areas are identified, developing an education approach and implementation strategies can help retailers adjust to new requirements.

Additionally, identifying opportunities for revenue generation and cost savings to support public health is important for determining where to direct new revenue from SSB taxes.

Similar to tobacco control taxes and regulatory efforts, it is important to anticipate and monitor any potential shifts in societal norms related to SSB consumption that could affect the effectiveness of SSB taxes.

Anticipated Challenges

The outcome of the ongoing litigation in Santa Cruz is expected to shape how local authorities approach adopting SSB excise taxes and may influence whether communities support or oppose such measures. Beverage companies have often pushed back against restrictions on SSBs, challenging them both in court and through public campaigns. Their main arguments are that SSBs meet USDA and FDA safety standards, and that consumers and retailers should have the freedom to buy and sell whatever products they choose. However, emerging evidence suggests that SSB excise taxes provide positive health and economic benefits across communities.

References

- 1 Kagan J. Excise Tax Definition. Investopedia. Published 2020. [investopedia.com/terms/e/excisetax.asp](https://www.investopedia.com/terms/e/excisetax.asp).
- 2 CDC. Get the facts: Sugar-Sweetened beverages and consumption. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. April 11, 2022. [cdc.gov/nutrition/data-statistics/sugar-sweetened-beverages-intake.html](https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/data-statistics/sugar-sweetened-beverages-intake.html).

- 3 Chriqui JF, Chaloupka FJ, Powell LM, Eidson SS. A typology of beverage taxation: multiple approaches for obesity prevention and obesity prevention-related revenue generation. *J Public Health Policy*. 2013;34(3):403-423. doi:10.1057/jphp.2013.17
- 4 Loughead K. Sales Taxes on Soda, Candy, and Other Groceries, 2018. Tax Foundation. July 11, 2018. taxfoundation.org/data/all/state/sales-taxes-on-soda-candy-and-other-groceries-2018.
- 5 UConn Rudd Center for Food Policy and Health. Sugary Drink Taxes. Accessed March 30, 2026. uconnruddcenter.org/research/foodpolicy/sugarydrink-taxes.
- 6 American Health Association. Evidence mounts that sugary drink taxes make communities healthier. Last reviewed Jul 22, 2025. Accessed March 30, 2026. heart.org/en/around-the-aha/evidence-mounts-that-sugary-drink-taxes-make-communities-healthier.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 Kaplan S, White JS, Madsen KA, et al. Evaluation of Changes in Prices and Purchases Following Implementation of Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Taxes Across the US. *JAMA Health Forum*. 2024;5(1):e234737. doi:10.1001/jamahealthforum.2023.4737.
- 9 Urban Institute & Brookings Institution Tax Policy Center. How do state and local soda taxes work? January 2024. Accessed March 29, 2026. taxpolicycenter.org/briefing-book/how-do-state-and-local-soda-taxes-work.
- 10 A Win for Local Democracy. ChangeLab Solutions. December 12, 2024. Accessed November 21, 2025. changelabsolutions.org/news/win-local-democracy.
- 11 Maa J, Adler S. Big Soda's ads on Santa Cruz's Measure Z fail to tell the full story. Lookout Santa Cruz. October 30, 2024. Accessed November 21, 2025. lookout.co/big-sodas-ads-on-santa-cruzs-measure-z-fail-to-tell-the-full-story.
- 12 Beverage industry sues to overturn Santa Cruz soda tax. California Medical Association. July 17, 2025. Accessed November 21, 2025. cmadocs.org/newsroom/news/view/ArticleId/50935/Beverage-industry-sues-to-overturn-Santa-Cruz-soda-tax.
- 13 Falbe J. The ethics of excise taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages. *Physiol Behav*. 2020;225:113105. doi:10.1016/j.physbeh.2020.113105.
- 14 ChangeLab Solutions. Model Sugary Drink Tax Legislation. 2014. changelabsolutions.org/product/model-sugary-drink-tax-legislation.

- 15 CHOICES, California Department of Public Health, Santa Clara County Public Health. *California: A Sugary Drink Excise Tax*. March 2021. Accessed April 29, 2026. choicesproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/CHOICES_LCP_California_SugaryDrinkTax_Report_2021_03_29.pdf.
- 16 Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Product Panel of Experts. City of Berkeley. Published July 15, 2025. Accessed August 28, 2025. berkeleyca.gov/your-government/boards-commissions/sugar-sweetened-beverage-product-panel-experts.
- 17 Berkeley Municipal Code s. 7.72.090. Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Product Panel of Experts. Accessed April 29, 2026. berkeley.municipal.codes/BMC/7.72.090.
- 18 Liu EF, Young DR, Sidell MA, et al. City-Level Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Taxes and Changes in Adult Body Mass Index. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2025;8(1):e2456170. 2025 Jan 2. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.56170.
- 19 Jones-Smith JC, Knox MA, Coe NB, et al. Sweetened beverage taxes: Economic benefits and costs according to household income. *Food Policy*. 2022;110:102277. doi:10.1016/j.foodpol.2022.102277.
- 20 Cooper JJ. California bows to beverage industry, blocks soda taxes. AP News. June 28, 2018. Accessed November 21, 2025. apnews.com/article/e55dbdab8855474788d370aa02244cc8.
- 21 ChangeLab Solutions. Ruling Affirmed in California Sugary Drink Tax Preemption Lawsuit. March 29, 2023. Accessed November 21, 2025. changelabsolutions.org/ruling-affirmed-california-sugary-drink-tax-preemption-lawsuit.
- 22 Institute for Local Government. Understanding the Basics of County and City Revenues (Footnoted Version). 2008. Accessed April 2, 2026. ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/revenue_guide_formatted_footnotes.pdf.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 Petimar J, Gibson LA, Roberto CA. Evaluating the evidence on beverage taxes: implications for public health and health equity. *JAMA Netw Open* 2022 Jun;5(6):e2215284. doi: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.15284.
- 25 California Department of Tax and Fee Administration. Implementing New Local Jurisdictions or District Taxes. Accessed April 29, 2026. cdtfa.ca.gov/industry/local-jurisdictions-and-districts/implementing-new-local-jurisdictions-district-taxes.htm.

- 26 Berkeley Media Studies Group. *Soda Tax Debates: A Case Study of Berkeley vs. Big Soda's Media Campaign*. January 18, 2016. Accessed May 19, 2026. bmsg.org/resources/publications/soda-tax-debates-a-case-study-of-berkeley-vs-big-sodas-social-media-campaign.
- 27 Somju A, Nixon L, Mejia P, Aziz A, Arbatman L, Dorfman. Soda tax debates in Berkeley and San Francisco: An analysis of social media, campaign materials and news coverage. January 2016. Accessed April 14, 2026. bmsg.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/bmsg_soda_tax_debates2016_web.pdf.
- 28 Garibay KK, Burke NJ, Ramírez AS, Payán DD. Examining the Role and Strategies of Advocacy Coalitions in California's Statewide Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Tax Debate (2001-2018). *Am J Health Promot*. 2024;38(1):101-111. doi:10.1177/08901171231201007.

Healthy Procurement

In the absence of comprehensive state policies, local governments and private institutions have a unique opportunity to shape the food environment within their own walls. While state laws set important baselines, local jurisdictions can adopt nutrition standards and food service guidelines for vending and concessions that are stricter or more tailored to community needs. These local efforts can fill gaps left by broader regulations and help ensure the foods and beverages available reflect the latest nutrition science and public health priorities.

Healthy procurement refers to a set of policies designed to improve access to healthy food on government property and in institutional settings and implement nutrition standards for packaged foods or prepared meals sold at a variety of institutions, such as offices, schools, hospitals, and other government buildings. These nutrition standards may relate to the level of food processing (unprocessed, minimally processed, or ultra-processed), required macronutrient profiles (carbohydrates, fats, and proteins), or limits on the amount of salt, sugar, and saturated fat per serving. They typically apply to foods sold in vending machines or at sales counters, cafeterias, kiosks, food carts, food trucks, and other food retail outlets. They may also apply to some or all meals, beverages, or snacks.

Procuring healthy and nutritious foods can make healthy eating and living more accessible and improve the physical and mental health of employees, clients, patients, students, patrons, visitors, and nearby residents.^{1,2} These policies can be adopted through local ordinances,³ executive orders or city council or board of supervisors resolutions,⁴ local regulations,⁵ and informal policies or guidance.⁶

References

- 1 Niebylski ML, Lu T, Campbell NR, Arcand J, et al. Healthy food procurement policies and their impact. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2014 Mar 3;11(3):2608-27. Accessed March 30, 2026. [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3986994/#sec9](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3986994/#sec9).
- 2 City Health Foundation. *Healthy Food Procurement: Policy Breakdown*. November 2019. Accessed March 30, 2026. cityhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/CityHealth_HealthyFoods_Nov2019.pdf.
- 3 E.g. Benicia Mun. Code § 3.08.100. Accessed March 30, 2026. codepublishing.com/CA/Benicia/html/Benicia03/Benicia0308.html#3.08.100.

- 4 E.g. Alameda County Resolution No. 2021-48. Accessed March 30, 2026. acgov.org/sustain/documents/AlamedaCountyGoodFoodPurchasingResolution.pdf.
- 5 E.g. S.F. Admin. Code § 21D.2. Accessed March 30, 2026. codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/san_francisco/latest/sf_admin/0-0-0-64507.
- 6 Santa Clara County. Nutrition Standards 2012 Implementation Guidance. 2012. Accessed March 30, 2026. files.santaclaracounty.gov/migrated/HealthElement_NUTRITION_STANDARDS_2012.pdf.

Local Healthy Procurement & Unhealthy Food & Beverage Sales Bans

Localities can combine the purchasing power of government, schools, and institutions to increase access to healthy foods. This can include requiring local government agencies to prioritize healthy foods when purchasing food to sell or serve on government property. For example, the Los Angeles Unified School District began implementing a healthy procurement program in 2012. Through its procurement policies, the program incentivizes local vendors whose products meet health and nutrition standards to contract with the school district by giving them preference in competitive bidding.¹

Local policies can also prohibit schools from purchasing ultra-processed foods of concern from vendors. As the state begins to implement the [Real Food, Healthy Kids Act \(AB 1264\)](#),² local educational agencies can develop policies that prioritize procurement of minimally processed foods. Local government institutions other than schools can institute similar policies.

As mentioned, local governments can establish nutrition standards that impose restrictions or minimum requirements on the nutritional value of food sold or served on government property. For example, Santa Clara County defined nutrition standards to guide food procurement for county meetings and events, government cafeterias, county-leased properties, and custodial populations.³

Further, municipalities and local agencies can adopt healthy vending policies and use permits and ordinances to promote healthy vending among street and sidewalk vendors. They can also implement nutrition standards and contract with vendors to provide healthy food and beverage options in vending machines on government property.⁴ Local laws and regulations can create certain allowances for vendors that sell healthier food. For example, a city might adopt an ordinance that allows only healthy food vendors to operate along designated “safe routes to schools.” Other policies can create exceptions to an existing ordinance that restricts vendors from operating close to schools or parks, granting healthy food vendors an allowance to operate in these otherwise restricted areas. Likewise, if local law requires vendors to relocate after a certain amount of time, local governments might enact an exception allowing vendors of healthy foods to stay in place. Implementing these policies to incentivize healthy street vending can increase access to healthy, culturally relevant, and cost-effective food options.⁵

Many communities have begun to pass and implement these street vending ordinances and regulations. For example, Fresno County has permit programs for street and sidewalk vendors,⁶ whereas the City of Emeryville permits sidewalk vending but bans vending near schools.⁷ Outside of California, New York City uses its Green Cart Permit program to place sidewalk produce vendors in neighborhoods that lack access to fresh fruits and vegetables.⁸ As mentioned above, policy mechanisms for healthy vending include ordinances and city or county regulations. Many municipalities have existing permitting and zoning ordinances that can be amended to incorporate healthy vending policies.

LHD Roles

LHDs can act as **educators** to the public on the need for and health impacts of healthy procurement policies. They can also be **connectors** for local agencies and community-based organizations that would potentially be affected by new healthy procurement policies.

LHDs with existing healthy procurement policies can act as **amplifiers** by sharing their jurisdiction's policy development and implementation experience so others can benefit from their lessons learned and successful strategies. They can then serve as **experts** by providing technical assistance and ongoing support for other local agencies looking to implement these policies.

Action Steps for LHDs

- **Review existing healthy, local, and values-based procurement requirements and assess what additions or changes need to be made.**
- **Reach out to the local procurement division and other relevant partners and government agencies to develop working relationships and establish common priorities. This can also begin to establish procurement workgroups and task forces. Additionally, reach out to establish relationships with cities and counties that have already developed these policies at the local level, such as Los Angeles County.**
- **Identify areas where technical assistance and education are needed across local entities and develop an education approach.**
- **Convene nutrition experts and relevant community groups and local agencies to develop nutrition standards and street vending policies.**

Recommended steps for implementing healthy vending and concession standards can be found in these two guides: [Smart Food Choices: How to Implement Food Service Guidelines in Public Facilities \(PDF\)](#) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) and [Healthy Nutrition Guidelines for Vending and Micro-Markets \(PDF\)](#) (Washington State Department of Health). For examples of actual standards, see [Model Beverage and Food Vending Machine Standards \(PDF\)](#) (National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity).

For more detailed information on how jurisdictions have implemented healthy procurement and healthy vending, please see [ChangeLab Solutions' Food Procurement Case Studies](#).

Local Healthy Procurement & Unhealthy Food & Beverage Sales Bans: Mini Community Engagement Plan

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
The role each partner can play across each phase of the planning process.			
Residents & Community Members	- Identify priorities and share lived experience. - Guide and inform the planning process.	- Provide ongoing feedback. - Identify cultural needs.	- Assess outcomes. - Ensure policies reflect community needs.
Government Agencies & Procurement Divisions	Engage in cross-department collaboration to develop standards and policies.	- Develop implementation strategies. - Provide technical assistance for implementation.	- Identify challenges across policy implementation and practice. - Identify ongoing needs and potential areas for expansion.
Community-Based Organizations & Advocacy Groups	- Identify community priorities. - Facilitate participation in the policy process. - Co-lead outreach.	- Mobilize residents. - Co-lead initiatives. - Develop best practices and model policies.	- Provide ongoing feedback. - Assess whether policies meet community needs. - Evaluate enforcement.

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
The role each partner can play across each phase of the planning process.			
Local Health Departments (LHDs)	• Provide health data. • Guide public health strategies.	• Lead interventions. • Facilitate coordination and collaboration.	• Track health outcomes. • Monitor disparities. • Evaluate outcomes. • Produce recommendations.
Academic Institutions & Research Centers	• Conduct assessments. • Provide evidence.	• Develop evaluation criteria. • Develop implementation guides.	• Evaluate outcomes. • Produce recommendations. • Update recommendations based on emerging scientific research.

Legal Considerations

There are several California laws that support implementing healthy procurement policies, particularly in schools and government agencies. There are no laws that preempt private institutions, such as hospitals and offices, from implementing their own vending and concession nutrition standards. Some of the supportive laws include:

- **Real Food, Healthy Kids Act (2025, AB 1264): Defines and phases out certain ultra-processed foods from school meals and concessions**
- **California School Food Safety Act (2024, AB 2316): Phases out food dyes (Blue 1, Blue 2, Green 3, Red 40, Yellow 5, and Yellow 6)**
- **California Food Safety Act (2023, AB 418): Phases out other additives (brominated vegetable oil, potassium bromate, propylparaben, and Red Dye 3)**
- **Healthy Food, Healthy Student Act (2016, SB 1169): Sets strict limits on the fat, sugar, salt, and caloric content of foods sold in vending machines and at other concession locations in schools**

Community Empowerment Strategies

A diverse group of community members and stakeholders should be given the opportunity to provide input, guidance, and consideration when setting nutrition standards for vending and concessions. Without community partnership and

consideration, culturally relevant foods can be unintentionally omitted from the choices provided, which can lead to community dissatisfaction and increased food waste. Effective community engagement can be achieved through advisory boards and surveys to identify food preferences and dietary restrictions, whether for health or religious reasons.

Implementation Strategies

First, local jurisdictions and agencies should assess any potential unintended consequences of implementing healthy procurement policies and identify mitigation strategies. For example, to address common barriers faced by local small businesses, as well as BIPOC- and woman-owned businesses, in government contracting, localities should assess whether the bidding process limits these businesses' ability to participate. Next, they can conduct community engagement with local, small, and BIPOC- and woman-owned businesses to determine challenge areas for participation and address them through technical assistance.

It is also important to conduct ongoing evaluation of existing policies to assess their successes and challenges. Policies should be adjusted regularly to address emerging issues and incorporate the most current research around healthy foods and beverages. New policies should include funding for staff time and resources to implement the new policies and procedures. Existing policies should also be evaluated to determine whether additional funding and staffing support are required.

Lastly, it is important to establish or designate an enforcement body to ensure policies are implemented equitably. Enforcement strategies should include education and opportunities to meet progressive goals rather than immediate punitive measures.

Anticipated Challenges

Implementation of healthy procurement policies can face challenges, such as limited understanding of procurement practices and procedures. Existing procedures and vendor relationships may be deeply ingrained, and procurement officers may need help navigating new processes. Identifying vendors that meet new standards can also be challenging. Lastly, tracking vendor data and data on the enforcement of new policies can present a potential challenge.

References

- 1 Stephens A. Tracking the Ripple Effects of LA's Good Food Purchasing Program. Center for Good Food Purchasing. Accessed March 30, 2026. goodfoodpurchasing.org/tracking-the-ripple-effects-of-las-good-food-purchasing-program.
- 2 CalMatters. AB 1264: Pupil Nutrition: restricted school foods and ultraprocessed foods of concern: prohibition. October 8, 2025. Accessed March 30, 2026.
- 3 Santa Clara County. Nutrition Standards 2012 Implementation Guidance. 2012. Accessed March 30, 2026. files.santaclaracounty.gov/migrated/HealthElement_NUTRITION_STANDARDS_2012.pdf.
- 4 ChangeLab Solutions. *Making Change: A Guide to Healthier Vending for Municipalities*. 2012. Accessed March 30, 2026. changelabsolutions.org/product/making-change-healthier-vending-municipalities.
- 5 Lane C, Naylor PJ, Tomlin D, et al. Healthy vending contracts: Do localized policy approaches improve the nutrition environment in publicly funded recreation and sport facilities? *Preventive Medicine Reports*; Volume 16; 2019. Accessed March 30, 2026. sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S221133551930138X.
- 6 Mobile Food Vendors. County of Fresno, CA. Accessed October 27, 2025. fresnocountyca.gov/Departments/Public-Health/Environmental-Health/Consumer-Food-Program/Mobile-Food-Vendors.
- 7 See, e.g., Emeryville, CA. Municipal Code §5-27.1.06 (banning mobile vending within 300 feet of elementary and secondary schools).
- 8 See, e.g., New York City Admin. Code § 17-307.

Values-Based Procurement

Values-based procurement policies facilitate procurement of local foods and beverages that reflect values such as health, sustainability, fair wages, and economic stability.¹ Research has found that this type of procurement positively affects health and local economies, such as by increasing vegetable intake among children.² Money spent on local food has also been shown to have a multiplier effect on the local economy, with recent research showing that each dollar spent generates \$1.32 to \$1.90 for the local economy.³ Additional recent research indicates that sourcing food locally translates to more local jobs, increased economic opportunity, and increased tax revenues to fund services. It also creates greater resilience against disruptions in the global food supply chain, which can disproportionately harm people who are marginalized based on income, race, ethnicity, and other factors.⁴

Values-based procurement policies can require or incentivize local governments and institutions, such as schools, prisons, and hospitals, to purchase food from local producers and vendors. For example, a local ordinance could require that local government institutions purchase food from vendors within a 200-mile radius. Additionally, these policies can make the bid and procurement contracting process more accessible for local, small, and values-based providers. This can be done by assessing existing procurement laws, regulations, and procedures for potential barriers to participation, such as requiring large contracts, which small vendors cannot meet alone.

LHD Roles

LHDs can act as **educators** on the need for and health and economic effects of values-based procurement policies. They can also be **connectors** for local agencies and community-based organizations that would potentially be affected by new values-based procurement policies.

LHDs with existing values-based procurement policies can act as **amplifiers** by sharing their jurisdiction's policy development and implementation experience so others can benefit from their lessons learned and successful strategies. They can then act as **experts** by providing technical assistance and ongoing support for other local agencies looking to implement these policies.

Action Steps for LHDs

- Review existing healthy, local, and values-based procurement requirements and assess what additions or changes need to be made.
- Reach out to the local procurement division and other relevant partners and government agencies to develop working relationships and establish common priorities. This can also begin to establish procurement workgroups and task forces. Additionally, reach out to establish relationships with cities and counties that have already developed these policies at the local level, such as Los Angeles County.
- Identify areas where technical assistance and education are needed across local entities and develop an education approach.

For more detailed information on how jurisdictions have implemented values-based procurement, please see [ChangeLab Solutions' Food Procurement Case Studies](#).

Values-Based Procurement: Mini Community Engagement Plan

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
The role each partner can play across each phase of the planning process.			
Government Agencies & Procurement Divisions	• Engage in cross-department collaboration to develop standards and policies.	• Develop implementation strategies. • Provide technical assistance for implementation to both agencies and vendors.	• Identify challenges across policy implementation and practice. • Identify ongoing needs and potential areas for expansion.
Residents & Community Members	• Identify priorities and share lived experience. • Guide and inform the planning process. • Identify potential barriers to participation.	• Provide ongoing feedback. • Identify cultural needs.	• Assess outcomes. • Ensure policies reflect community needs.

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
The role each partner can play across each phase of the planning process.			
Community-Based Organizations & Advocacy Groups	- Identify community priorities. - Facilitate participation in the policy process. - Co-lead outreach.	- Mobilize residents. - Co-lead initiatives. - Develop best practices and model policies.	- Provide ongoing feedback. - Assess whether policies meet community needs. - Evaluate enforcement.
Local Health Departments (LHDs)	- Provide health data. - Guide public health strategies.	- Lead interventions. - Facilitate coordination and collaboration.	- Track health outcomes. - Monitor disparities.
Academic Institutions & Research Centers	- Conduct assessments. - Provide evidence.	- Develop evaluation criteria. - Develop implementation guides.	- Evaluate outcomes. - Produce recommendations. - Update recommendations based on emerging scientific research.

Legal Considerations

Although California state law is largely supportive of values-based procurement and many communities have adopted their own policy framework to meet values-based goals,⁵ there are some important considerations when applying a local geographic preference. Determining whether a local government entity may apply a geographic preference requires consideration of both state and local law.^{6,7} For government entities in charter cities and counties, requirements set out in the local code of ordinances often guide the procurement process. Local educational agencies such as schools and school districts are subject to special requirements. For a more in-depth discussion, please see [ChangeLab Solutions' Homegrown: Implementing State & Local Preferences for Food Procurement](#).

Community Empowerment Strategies

A diverse group of community members and stakeholders should be given the opportunity to provide input, guidance, and consideration when setting nutrition standards for vending and concessions. Without community partnership and consideration, culturally relevant foods can be unintentionally omitted from the choices provided, which can lead to community dissatisfaction and increased food waste. Effective community engagement can be achieved through advisory boards and surveys to identify food preferences and dietary restrictions whether, for health or religious reasons.

Implementation Strategies

Assess any potential unintended consequences of implementing values-based procurement policies and identify mitigation strategies. For example, to address common barriers faced by local small businesses, as well as BIPOC- and woman-owned businesses, in government contracting, localities should assess whether the bidding process limits these businesses' ability to participate.

Conduct community engagement with local, small, and BIPOC- and woman-owned businesses to determine challenge areas for participation and address them through technical assistance.

Conduct ongoing evaluation of existing policies to assess their successes and challenges. Policies should be adjusted regularly to address emerging issues and incorporate the most current research around healthy foods and beverages.

New policies should include funding for staff time and resources to implement the new policies and procedures.

Establish or designate an enforcement body to ensure policies are being implemented equitably. Enforcement strategies should include education and opportunities to meet progressive goals rather than immediate punitive measures.

Anticipated Challenges

Implementation of values-based procurement policies can face challenges, such as limited understanding of procurement practices and procedures. Existing procedures and vendor relationships may be deeply ingrained, and procurement officers may need help navigating new processes. Identifying vendors that meet new standards can also be challenging. Lastly, tracking vendor data and data on the enforcement of new policies can present a potential challenge.

References

- 1 Good Food Purchasing Program. The Good Food Purchasing Program Values. Accessed April 2, 2026. goodfoodcities.org/values.
- 2 Coakley KE, Lin L, Gonzales-Pacheco D, et al. Multi-Level Health Outcomes of Local Food Procurement in United States Farm-to-School Programs: A Systematic Review. *Adv Nutr*. 2026 Feb;17(2):100580. Accessed April 2, 2026. pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12857378.
- 3 Brinkmeyer E, Dankbar H, Bloom JD. *Local Food Systems: Clarifying Current Research: Local Foods*. NC State Extension. August 11, 2023. Accessed April 2, 2026. content.ces.ncsu.edu/local-food-systems-clarifying-current-research.
- 4 Econsult Solutions. Greater Good: The Economic Case for More Local, Resilient, and Equitable Food Systems. December 11, 2023. goodfoodpurchasing.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Greater-Good-Jobs-Study-Report_FINAL.pdf.
- 5 E.g. LiveWell San Diego. ARPA Food Procurement Policy Framework. Presentation to Health Services Advisory Board. June 7, 2022. Accessed April 2, 2026. sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/hhsa/programs/phs/documents/HSABDocuments/HSABDocuments2022/June2022/HSAB%20Presentation%20-%20ARPA%20Food%20Procurement%20Program%20Policy%20Framework.pdf.
- 6 Cal. Pub. Contract Code § 1100; California Procurement Handbook §§ 3.3, 4.1 (2024-2025 ed.).
- 7 California Procurement Handbook §§ 3.3, 4.1 (2024-2025 ed.).

Local Wellness Plans & Policies

Another way to implement healthy procurement and nutrition standards is through local wellness plans and policies. Local wellness policies are required under federal law for schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program.¹ As part of these programs, local wellness policies must include a plan for how implementation will be measured, and how the policy content and any implementation issues will be shared with the public.² The California Department of Education provides resources and trainings on developing a local wellness policy³ and the required implementation plan.

Municipalities can develop or revise local wellness plans to ban ultra-processed foods and integrate updated nutrition standards. In addition to being a requirement for local educational agencies that participate in these federal programs, they can also help advance other community-level policies that promote healthy eating.⁴ For example, research has found that local wellness policies that include nutrition standards lead to healthier procurement practices.⁵

Additionally, federal and state requirements only set a baseline for what is required to be included in local wellness policies and plans. Municipalities can choose to include additional healthy procurement-related requirements and guidance. Further, some research has shown that these policies and plans can be expanded to address the health and academic needs of students with chronic health conditions. Although local educational agencies are required to incorporate nutrition standards and other healthy food-related information into their wellness policies,^{6,7} this type of policy could be expanded at the local level to require the same of other local government institutions.⁸

LHD Roles

As **educators**, LHDs can communicate with the public about the need for and health effects of wellness policies and plans, particularly implementation plans and best practices. They can also be **connectors** for local agencies and community-based organizations that would potentially be affected by new wellness policies and plans.

LHDs with existing wellness policies and plans can act as **amplifiers** by sharing their policy development and implementation experience with the school districts in their jurisdiction so they can benefit from their lessons learned and successful strategies. They can then act as **experts** by providing technical assistance and ongoing support for other local agencies looking to implement these policies.

Action Steps for LHDs

- Review existing wellness policies for healthy, local, and values-based procurement requirements and assess what additions or changes are needed.
- Reach out to the local procurement division and other relevant partners and government agencies to develop working relationships and establish common priorities. This can also help begin to establish procurement workgroups and task forces. Additionally, reach out to establish relationships with cities and counties that have already developed these policies at the local level, such as Los Angeles County.
- Identify areas where technical assistance and education are needed across local entities and develop an education approach.
- Convene nutrition experts, relevant community groups, and relevant local agencies to develop core components of wellness policies and plans.

Local Wellness Plans & Policies: Mini Community Engagement Plan

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
The role each partner can play across each phase of the planning process.			
Residents of Disadvantaged Communities	• Identify priorities and share lived experience. • Guide and inform the planning process.	• Provide ongoing feedback. • Identify cultural needs.	• Assess outcomes. • Ensure policies reflect community needs.
Community-Based Organizations & Advocacy Groups	• Identify community priorities. • Facilitate participation in the policy process. • Co-lead outreach.	• Mobilize residents. • Co-lead initiatives. • Develop best practices and model policies.	• Provide ongoing feedback. • Assess whether policies meet community needs. • Evaluate enforcement.

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
The role each partner can play across each phase of the planning process.			
LHDs & Local Educational Agencies	• Provide health data. • Guide public health strategies. • Provide examples of existing policies.	• Lead interventions. • Facilitate coordination and collaboration.	• Track health outcomes. • Monitor disparities.
Academic Institutions & Research Centers	• Conduct assessments. • Provide evidence.	• Develop evaluation criteria. • Develop implementation guides.	• Evaluate outcomes. • Produce recommendations. • Update recommendations based on emerging scientific research.

Legal Considerations

There are several California laws that support implementing nutrition standards for vending and concessions and other policies within wellness plans, particularly in schools and government buildings. There are no laws that preempt private institutions, such as hospitals and offices, from implementing their own vending and concession nutrition standards. Some of the supportive laws include:

- **Real Food, Healthy Kids Act (2025, AB 1264): Defines and phases out certain ultra-processed foods from school meals and concessions**
- **California School Food Safety Act (2024, AB 2316): Phases out food dyes (Blue 1, Blue 2, Green 3, Red 40, Yellow 5, and Yellow 6)**
- **California Food Safety Act (2023, AB 418): Phases out other additives (brominated vegetable oil, potassium bromate, propylparaben, and Red Dye 3)**
- **Healthy Food, Healthy Student Act (2016, SB 1169): Sets strict limits on the fat, sugar, salt, and caloric content of foods sold in vending machines and at other concession locations in schools**

Additionally, local laws must be aligned with current federal wellness policy requirements.

Community Empowerment Strategies

A diverse group of community members and stakeholders should be given the opportunity to provide input, guidance, and consideration when setting nutrition standards for vending and concessions. Without community partnership and consideration, culturally relevant foods can be unintentionally omitted from the choices provided, which can lead to community dissatisfaction and increased food waste. Effective community engagement can be achieved through advisory boards and surveys to identify food preferences and dietary restrictions, whether for health or religious reasons.

Implementation Strategies

Assess any potential unintended consequences of implementing healthy procurement practices within wellness policies.

Conduct community engagement with local educational agencies, students, and local, small, and BIPOC-owned businesses to determine challenge areas for participation and address them through technical assistance.

Conduct ongoing evaluation of existing policies to assess their successes and challenges. Policies should be adjusted regularly to address emerging issues and incorporate the most current research around healthy foods and beverages.

New policies should include funding for staff time and resources to implement the new policies and procedures.

Anticipated Challenges

Implementation of wellness policies can face challenges, such as limited understanding of procurement practices and procedures. Existing procedures and vendor relationships may be deeply ingrained, and procurement officers may need help navigating new processes. Identifying vendors that meet new standards can also be challenging. Lastly, tracking vendor data and data on the enforcement of new policies can present a potential challenge, and school wellness policies will need to align with federal and state law.

References

- 1 7 C.F.R. § 210.31(c).
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 California Dept of Ed. Local School Wellness Policy. September 18, 2024. Accessed April 2, 2026. cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/he/wellness.asp.
- 4 U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. Local School Wellness Policies. September 9, 2025. Accessed March 30, 2026. fns.usda.gov/tn/wellness-policy.
- 5 Piekarz-Porter E, Leider J, Turner L, Chriqui JF. District Wellness Policy Nutrition Standards Are Associated with Healthier District Food Procurement Practices in the United States. *Nutrients*. 2020 Nov 7;12(11):3417. Accessed March 30, 2026. [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7694957](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7694957).
- 6 U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. Local School Wellness Policies. September 9, 2025. Accessed March 30, 2026. fns.usda.gov/tn/wellness-policy.
- 7 Cal. Dept. of Education. Local School Wellness Policy. September 18, 2024. Accessed March 30, 2026. cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/he/wellness.asp.
- 8 Bobo N, Olson J, Simmons-Wright S. Using Local Wellness Policies to Build a Culture of Health for Students with Chronic Health Conditions: The School Nurse Role. *NASN School Nurse*; Vol. 37(1); June 30, 2021. Accessed April 2, 2026. journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1942602X211026365.

Sugar-Sweetened Beverage (SSB) Sales Bans

Local government entities and private employers can help employees and visitors enjoy healthier beverage options by limiting SSBs on their property. Private employers are generally free to create policies and enter into contracts with vendors as they see fit. These policies could include vending and catering rules that prohibit the purchase of SSBs, or policies that prohibit SSBs from being served in common dining areas or at meetings and events. Government entities, for their part, can control what types of foods and beverages are served on their property through their purchasing power – that is, the power to buy and sell goods and services. Government entities have a wide influence, especially among underserved populations. For example, government agencies provide food and beverages to people in jails, juvenile facilities, public hospitals, childcare centers, schools, and senior programs. They also provide food and beverages to their employees and the public through retail outlets, cafeterias, and concession stands on their property.

By adopting purchasing policies that ban SSBs – which are often part of broader healthy procurement policies – the public and private sectors can provide healthier beverages to employees and community members, thereby making a positive impact on community health. If their purchasing volume is large enough, these entities may also be able to influence the types of beverages available more broadly to the community by building greater demand for healthier products.

Many government agencies have implemented procurement policies to reduce SSB consumption. In 2011, Boston Mayor Thomas Menino signed an executive order that transitioned the city to healthier beverage standards.¹ The order required all beverages sold in vending machines, at city-managed programs, through contracted services, and via food or beverage concessions in or around city-owned buildings to follow the Boston Healthy Options Beverage Standards. A study conducted in 2013 found that this policy reduced the availability of high-sugar sodas on city property by almost 30%, while overall beverage prices did not increase.²

LHD Roles

LHDs can act as **educators** on the need for and health effects of implementing SSB bans. They can also be **connectors** for local agencies and community-based organizations that would potentially be affected by new SSB sales bans and convene local agencies and vendors to facilitate new contracts that exclude SSBs.

LHDs with existing SSB sales bans can act as **amplifiers** by sharing their jurisdiction's policy development and implementation experience so others can benefit from their lessons learned and successful strategies. They can then act as **experts** by providing technical assistance and ongoing support for other local agencies looking to implement these policies.

Action Steps for LHDs

- **Reach out to other local government entities to develop working relationships and establish common priorities. Local government departments with direct involvement in food and beverage purchasing and distribution can be key partners. LHDs can help make a case for the public health benefits of changing a procurement policy. Interdepartmental partners can include financial decision-makers and purchasing officers.**
- **Reach out to establish relationships with cities and counties that have already developed these policies at the local level, such as San Francisco or Boston.**
- **Update local government procurement policies (e.g., food service guidelines) to restrict the sale and service of SSBs on government property.**
- **Include updated procurement policies in government solicitations for bids or proposals to ensure all food service requirements are clearly specified and enforced through contracts between the government and vendors. The final contract must include a requirement to comply with the guidelines.**
- **Use a permit process to regulate the sale of SSBs on government property. Permits can require that vendors comply with food service guidelines.**

For more detailed information regarding how municipalities and other jurisdictions have implemented SSB bans, please see [ChangeLab Solutions' Beverage Procurement Case Studies](#).

Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Sales Bans: Community Engagement Plan

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
The role each partner can play across each phase of the planning process.			
Government Agencies & Procurement Divisions	Engage in cross-department collaboration to develop standards and policies.	- Develop implementation strategies. - Provide technical assistance for implementation.	- Identify challenges across policy implementation and practice. - Identify ongoing needs and potential areas for expansion.
Residents & Community Members	- Identify priorities and share lived experience. - Guide and inform the planning process.	- Provide ongoing feedback. - Identify cultural needs.	- Assess outcomes. - Ensure policies reflect community needs.
Community-Based Organizations & Advocacy Groups	- Identify community priorities. - Facilitate participation in the policy process. - Co-lead outreach.	- Mobilize residents. - Co-lead initiatives. - Develop best practices and model policies.	- Provide ongoing feedback. - Assess whether policies meet community needs. - Evaluate enforcement.
Local Health Departments (LHDs)	- Provide health data. - Guide public health strategies. - Provide examples of existing policies.	- Lead interventions. - Facilitate coordination and collaboration.	- Track health outcomes. - Monitor disparities.
Academic Institutions & Research Centers	- Conduct assessments. - Provide evidence.	- Develop evaluation criteria. - Develop implementation guides.	- Evaluate outcomes. - Produce recommendations. - Update recommendations based on emerging scientific research.

Legal Considerations

There are no state laws in California that prohibit banning SSBs on government or private property. The design and implementation of SSB bans is mainly the responsibility of local governments. Likewise, many private sector organizations, such as corporations and nonprofits, can voluntarily implement strategies aimed at reducing their SSB purchases.

Community Empowerment Strategies

Community and civic organizations have close ties to residents and often play an important role in supporting community health. Partnering with these groups can help larger systems better understand and address local needs. Community-based organizations are valuable sources of advice on how to craft policies that will resonate, meet real needs, and provide the greatest benefit during implementation. Advocates for healthier beverage choices can form ongoing partnerships with vendors to promote better habits and support local businesses. Diverse businesses – including those owned by people of color, women, veterans, and people with disabilities – often offer unique and useful perspectives. In the private sector, involving employees early can boost support and make changes to beverage offerings easier. Anchor institutions, large place-based organizations that provide support to the community, are deeply rooted in their communities. Getting input from those affected by their policies is crucial for success. Many anchor institutions already work with community groups, such as advisory boards, to advance health goals. These partnerships can also be used to build support for reducing SSBs as part of broader health initiatives.

Implementation Strategies

Assess any potential unintended consequences of implementing SSB sale bans and identify mitigation strategies. For example, partners can engage with vendors to provide technical assistance and education about transition to other non-SSB products.

Conduct community engagement with local, small, and BIPOC- and woman-owned businesses to determine challenge areas for participation and address them through technical assistance.

Conduct ongoing evaluation of existing policies to assess their successes and challenges. Policies should be adjusted regularly to address emerging issues and incorporate the most current research around healthy foods and beverages.

New policies should include funding for staff time and resources to implement the new policies and procedures.

Establish or designate an enforcement body to ensure policies are being implemented equitably. Enforcement strategies should include education and opportunities to meet progressive goals rather than immediate punitive measures.

Anticipated Challenges

Implementation of new or updated procurement policies to restrict SSBs served or sold on public or private property can face challenges, such as limited understanding of procurement practices and procedures. Many procedures and vendor relationships are deeply ingrained, and procurement officers may need help navigating new processes. Identifying vendors that meet new standards can also be challenging. Lastly, tracking vendor data and data on the enforcement of new policies can present a potential challenge.

References

- 1 Boston, Mass., Exec. Order of Mayor Thomas M. Menino, An Order Relative to Healthy Beverage Options; Apr. 7, 2011. Accessed April 29, 2026. cityofboston.gov/news/uploads/14552_36_9_3.pdf.
- 2 Cradock AL, Kenney EL, McHugh A, et al. Evaluating the Impact of the Healthy Beverage Executive Order for City Agencies in Boston, Massachusetts, 2011–2013. *Prev Chronic Dis.* 2015;12:140549. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5888/pcd12.140549>.

School Food

School Meals

Because school meals make up a significant portion of children's diets, policies to make them healthy and nutritious can have positive effects on children's overall and long-term health.¹ Schools can improve meals by standardizing how they are made as well as what they are made of. Restricting schools from serving unhealthy meals paves the way for healthier options to become the norm.

Premade and ultra-processed foods often contain additives, preservatives, and refined ingredients that have been linked to poorer diet quality and increased risk of chronic diseases such as obesity and cardiovascular disease.² Premade school meals and school meals made using ultra-processed foods come with similar health risks for children.^{3,4} In particular, preparing school meals from scratch rather than serving precooked or heat-and-serve options allows for greater control over ingredients, portion sizes, and cooking methods – all of which can reduce excess sodium, added sugars, and unhealthy fats.⁵ This is because scratch-cooked meals rely more on whole and minimally processed ingredients, such as fresh produce, whole grains, and legumes, which can improve overall diet quality for children.⁶

California imposes nutrition standards for school meals, but it does not require school meals to be made from scratch. However, scratch-made school meals have become more common in recent years as it has become increasingly normalized in California public schools of all types and sizes.⁷ A list of scratch cooking recipes used by school kitchens across the state can be found on the [California Department of Education's California Culinary Centers Standardized Recipes webpage](#). School districts and local governments can allocate funding to develop school property to support onsite scratch cooking and establish relationships with nearby facilities with the necessary equipment for scratch cooking.

LHD Roles

LHDs can act as both **experts** and **educators** through information sharing efforts that highlight the health benefits associated with scratch cooking for a wide variety of audiences, including the school community, other school districts, and other agencies that serve school-aged children. LHDs can provide evidence of the efficacy of scratch cooking as a method of improving children's diet quality and reducing rates of chronic illnesses like obesity and cardiovascular

disease among children. They can also spotlight success stories from similarly situated communities that have implemented scratch cooking in schools. Overall, raising community awareness of scratch cooking can raise local support for its implementation.

LHDs can also act as **connectors** by facilitating workgroups to help schools, parents, students, and potential community partners work together to balance various concerns surrounding the implementation of scratch-cooking policies (e.g., funding, staffing). LHDs should connect parties that collectively represent the individuals that will be most affected by implementing a school scratch-cooking policy.

School Meals: Mini Community Engagement Plan

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
The role each partner can play across each phase of the planning process.			
School & School Nutrition Staff	- Collect and analyze community feedback on current school meal practices and offerings. - Identify partners within the school ecosystem who are aware of the shift to scratch cooking for school meals and invite them to participate in program development. - Partner with farmers, vendors, local businesses, and other stakeholders to provide fresh ingredients for scratch cooking.	Upgrade school kitchens with new equipment, in partnership with relevant school leadership to ensure updates are up to code and do not significantly disrupt ordinary business.	- Evaluate school kitchen scratch-cooking practices for opportunities to improve menus, workflows, and sustainability. - Ensure school meals reflect community needs and preferences.

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
The role each partner can play across each phase of the planning process.			
Community-Based Organizations & Local Businesses	• Help schools collect and analyze community feedback on current meal practices and offerings. • Garner interest from other local organizations and businesses in providing in-kind or monetary support to schools.	• Support school kitchen upgrades through in-kind donations of necessary equipment or scratch-cooking trainings for school kitchen staff.	• Support the evaluation of school kitchen scratch-cooking practices, including identifying opportunities to improve menus, workflows, and sustainability.
Students, Parents, Caregivers, & Families	• Identify priorities and needs around school meals (e.g., affordability, cultural relevance). • Share preferences and dietary restrictions to help inform school meal menus. • Help brainstorm appropriate menus that are responsive to student needs and interests.	• Provide feedback on various aspects of school meals (e.g., taste, cultural relevance) during the piloting phase.	• Support the evaluation of school kitchen scratch-cooking practices, specifically whether menus are responsive to community needs.

Partner	Development	Implementation	Evaluation
The role each partner can play across each phase of the planning process.			
Local Health Departments (LHDs)	- Engage in information sharing efforts in collaboration with school staff regarding healthy eating and scratch cooking. - Help schools collect and analyze community feedback on current meal practices and offerings. - Leverage skills for wider community outreach, such as the ability to convene focus groups or listening sessions.	Ensure school meal preparation follows health and safety standards.	- Help schools collect and analyze data related to the scratch-cooking school meal program. - Assess scratch-cooking practices on an ongoing basis to ensure they continue to meet health and safety standards, identify opportunities for improvement, and provide regular refresher trainings as needed.

Action Steps for LHDs

- Review existing school nutrition standards to assess what additions or changes need to be made to promote meals made from scratch using whole or minimally processed ingredients.
- Reach out to school food administrators or directors of child nutrition to develop an understanding of the school meal programs and food procurement practices and policies.
- Take stock of the schools' current assets, including existing funding streams and community partners, and identify areas where new funding or partnerships may be needed. Additionally, take stock of facilities available to the school, including offsite options (e.g., a central preparation facility) if applicable.

- **Establish workgroups of community members, school administrators and staff, community-based organizations, local restaurants and food service providers, and other stakeholders to begin designing a scratch-cooking program in schools.**
- **Build or strengthen diverse community relationships with current and potential partners to support efforts such as grant applications, implementation, or campaigns to pass voter-approved funding (if such funding is needed to develop school facilities to accommodate onsite scratch cooking).**
- **Share data on the health effects of scratch-made school meals to help make the case for additional funding, as well as data on health disparities to inform how funding should be prioritized.**

Legal Considerations

Meals in California public schools must conform with standards set by federal and state law. On the federal level, USDA publishes school meal nutrition standards for all public schools across the country to follow.⁸ In California, there are several laws that support implementing nutrition standards, particularly in schools. Some of the supportive laws include:

- **Real Food, Healthy Kids Act (2025, AB 1264): Defines and phases out certain ultra-processed foods from school meals and concessions**
- **California School Food Safety Act (2024, AB 2316): Phases out food dyes (Blue 1, Blue 2, Green 3, Red 40, Yellow 5, and Yellow 6)**
- **California Food Safety Act (2023, AB 418): Phases out other additives (brominated vegetable oil, potassium bromate, propylparaben, and Red Dye 3)**
- **Healthy Food, Healthy Student Act (2016, SB 1169): Sets strict limits on the fat, sugar, salt, and caloric content of foods sold in vending machines and at other concession locations in schools**

There are no California laws that mandate scratch-made school meals, nor are there laws that prohibit them. As such, many California public schools have incorporated scratch cooking – both as a way to provide healthy meals and as a type of vocational education – through internal policies and programs.⁹ Additionally, some districts, such as the San Francisco Unified School District, have vocational culinary arts programs that empower students to develop culinary skills while providing

scratch-made meals to the larger student body.¹⁰ Finally, food prepared in schools for consumption must adhere to food safety standards and other regulations as described in the California Retail Food Code.¹¹

Community Empowerment Strategies

A diverse group of community members and stakeholders, including parents, students, food service staff, cultural leaders, and local farmers and producers, should be actively engaged in shaping menu standards and implementation strategies to incorporate scratch cooking in schools. Meaningful community partnership helps ensure the meals are not just healthy, but also reflective of the cultural food traditions and preferences of the students being served. Without this input, culturally relevant dishes may be overlooked, leading to reduced meal participation and increased food waste. Community empowerment can be achieved through listening sessions, advisory councils, and surveys that identify preferred scratch-cooking recipes, culturally significant ingredients, and dietary needs related to health conditions or religious practices. By incorporating community voices into the early stages of policy and program design, California public schools can strengthen acceptance of scratch-made meals, promote cultural inclusion, and build long-term support for healthier school food systems. Cross-sector partnerships with community stakeholders, such as food hubs, and private entities, such as food suppliers, vendors, and restaurants, can alleviate limitations in funding or skilled cafeteria staff.

Implementation Strategies

Conduct a readiness assessment early on to evaluate school kitchen infrastructure, equipment, and storage capacity, as well as kitchen staff's skill levels and ability to support large-scale scratch cooking.

Begin with a slow ramp-up in production, such as starting with scratch-made soups, sides, or breakfast items, before moving to fully scratch-made meals.

Pilot full-scale scratch cooking among a small set of schools or a small body of students (e.g., a light snack for students in after-school programs).

Invest in culinary training and workforce development, such as paid training time, hands-on workshops, and mentorship opportunities. Leverage partnerships with local food providers, such as restaurants and the school's culinary education program, if applicable.

Track meal participation, food costs, labor, and waste reduction to assess sustainability.

Consider speed-scratch cooking if scratch cooking is unfeasible due to limited funding, infrastructure, or other factors. Speed-scratch cooking involves outsourcing some of the food preparation steps to local contractors and, in some cases, local restaurants.¹²

Anticipated Challenges

There are some challenges associated with implementing a scratch-cooking school meal policy or program. Training kitchen staff and adapting school infrastructure require significant investment. Capital improvements are required for most schools, because they lack full-service kitchens and adequately trained staff.¹³ Lack of funding is another barrier that prevents many schools from transitioning to scratch cooking.¹⁴ One study notes that an estimated \$5.81 billion is needed in order to make all California public school kitchen facilities fully capable to run scratch-cooking operations.¹⁵ Strategic investment is necessary to build scratch-cooking infrastructure both locally and statewide.¹⁶ For example, investment may be prioritized for schools that are more likely to rely primarily on federal funding and lack alternative funding sources; these schools are also more likely to serve students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.¹⁷

References

- 1 Zuercher, M.D., Orta-Aleman, D., French, C.D., Cohen, J.F.W., et al., “Factors and Outcomes Associated With Using Scratch-Cooked, Organic, and Locally Grown Foods in School Meals in California,” *J Sch Health*, 95: 235-246. (2025) doi.org/10.1111/josh.13533.
- 2 The Lancet Regional Health-Americas. Unhealthy school meals: A solution to hunger or a problem for health? *Lancet Reg Health Am*. 2022 Dec 8;16:100413. doi: 10.1016/j.lana.2022.100413.
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 Zuercher, M.D., Orta-Aleman, D., French, C.D., Cohen, J.F.W., et al., “Factors and Outcomes Associated With Using Scratch-Cooked, Organic, and Locally Grown Foods in School Meals in California,” *J Sch Health*, 95: 235-246. (2025) doi.org/10.1111/josh.13533.
- 5 *Ibid.*

- 6 Garcia-Jackson B, et al., Nutrient Intakes and Diet Quality of Children Participating in the U.S. School Meals Program. *Current Developments in Nutrition* 8, suppl. 2 (2024) doi.org/10.1016/j.cdnut.2024.102449.
- 7 Vincent, J.M., Gunderson, A., Friedman, D. McKee Brown, A., et al., 2020. Are California Public Schools Scratch-Cooking Ready? A survey of food service directors on the state of school kitchens. Berkeley: Center for Cities + Schools, University of California-Berkeley. 2020. citiesandschools.berkeley.edu/blog/new-ccs-study-are-california-public-school-kitchens-scratch-cooking-ready.
- 8 Lunch Meal Pattern (Grades K–12). California Department of Education. Updated March 18, 2026. Accessed March 27, 2026. cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/he/newfbmplunch.asp.
- 9 Zuercher, M.D., Orta-Aleman, D., French, C.D., Cohen, J.F.W., et al., “Factors and Outcomes Associated With Using Scratch-Cooked, Organic, and Locally Grown Foods in School Meals in California,” *J Sch Health*, 95: 235-246. (2025) doi.org/10.1111/josh.13533.
- 10 San Francisco Unified School District, “McAteer Culinary Center,” *SFUSD Bond Program* (2016), sfusd.edu/bond/programs/2016/sns/mcateer-culinary-center.
- 11 Cal Health & Safety Code §§113700-114437.
- 12 Vincent, J.M., Gunderson, A., Friedman, D. McKee Brown, A., et al., 2020. Are California Public Schools Scratch-Cooking Ready? A survey of food service directors on the state of school kitchens. Berkeley: Center for Cities + Schools, University of California-Berkeley. (2020). citiesandschools.berkeley.edu/blog/new-ccs-study-are-california-public-school-kitchens-scratch-cooking-ready.
- 13 Zuercher, M.D., Orta-Aleman, D., French, C.D., Cohen, J.F.W., et al., “Factors and Outcomes Associated With Using Scratch-Cooked, Organic, and Locally Grown Foods in School Meals in California,” *J Sch Health*, 95: 235-246. (2025) doi.org/10.1111/josh.13533.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 Vincent, J.M., Gunderson, A., Friedman, D. McKee Brown, A., et al., 2020. Are California Public Schools Scratch-Cooking Ready? A survey of food service directors on the state of school kitchens. Berkeley: Center for Cities + Schools, University of California-Berkeley. 2020. citiesandschools.berkeley.edu/blog/new-ccs-study-are-california-public-school-kitchens-scratch-cooking-ready.
- 16 *Ibid.*

- 17 Zuercher, M.D., Orta-Aleman, D., French, C.D., Cohen, J.F.W., et al., “Factors and Outcomes Associated With Using Scratch-Cooked, Organic, and Locally Grown Foods in School Meals in California,” *J Sch Health*, 95: 235-246. (2025) doi.org/10.1111/josh.13533.

Acknowledgments

The California Department of Public Health's mission is to advance the health and well-being of California's diverse people and communities.

Support for this resource was provided by the California Department of Public Health Nutrition and Physical Activity Branch. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department.

This material was funded by USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This institution is an equal opportunity provider. Visit CalFreshHealthyLiving.org for healthy tips.

ChangeLab Solutions is a nonprofit organization that provides legal information on matters relating to public health. The legal information in this document does not constitute legal advice or legal representation. For legal advice, readers should consult a lawyer in their state.

Content from this publication may be reproduced without permission, provided the following citation is made: ChangeLab Solutions and California Department of Public Health. *Local Policy Agenda*. 2026. changelabsolutions.org/product/cdph-local-policy-agenda.

Design: Karen Parry | Black Graphics

Copyright © 2026 ChangeLab Solutions

This resource was published in June 2026.