

Integrating Health & Buildings

GuideBox

How do buildings look, function,
and feel?



Integrating Health & Buildings



How our homes and buildings are located, constructed, and arranged can influence our health and well-being. For example, the appearance and arrangement of our homes and buildings, in terms of size, scale, and proximity to one another influence our physical and mental health. It is beneficial for buildings to reflect the character of the community where they are located. This provides a sense of place which in turn results in improved physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Additionally, the indoor spaces in which we live and work can have serious impacts on our health. We spend much of our time indoors, so the materials used in home-building and construction impact our health more than we realize. The ability to access fresh air and sunlight in our buildings can improve mood and reduce anxiety.

The initial set of questions that follow offer discussion points for planning a meeting or session with a focus on health and buildings. A second list of points are provided to encourage a more detailed discussion concerning the relationship between health and buildings. These lists are not exhaustive and should be discussed while thinking about your community.

Note, some of these questions may require some advance preparation and research on the part of the organizers or facilitators.

Questions for Discussion

1 What is the condition of buildings in the community?

What kinds of buildings are in the neighborhood or community?

- Housing
- Employment
- Education
- Civic buildings (such as, libraries, district courts, recreation centers)
- Public places and civic spaces
- Health or wellness services
- Entertainment

How would you characterize construction quality and upkeep of buildings in the community?

- Physical condition
- Energy efficiency and environmentally friendly materials
- Safety and accessibility

What kinds of buildings are in the neighborhood or community?

- Air quality (contained wood-burning stove or fireplace, absence of mold or mildew, absence of radon)
- Type of ventilation
- Toxic-free materials
- Absence of lead paint
- Accessible for all ages and abilities



2 How are buildings arranged?

How do buildings relate to the street or sidewalk?

- Storefront opens to sidewalk
- Large or small parking lot between the street and the storefront
- No entrance to the storefront from street or sidewalk

Do building arrangements provide a sense of safety and welcome?

- Adequate lighting
- No blank walls or alcoves
- Vegetation or green space is present
- Human activity
- Accessible on foot or by biking
- Public art

Are there vacant properties within the community? If so, are they maintained and safe?

3 How do homes and housing in the community impact residents?

Does the current housing stock meet the needs of all residents?

- Affordability
- Housing types
- Single-unit homes
- Apartments, duplexes, or multi-unit homes
- Accessible housing (according to the American with Disabilities Act)
- Availability of housing
- Condition of housing

Are there high rates of displacement? Is gentrification occurring?
Are there programs or opportunities to help keep residents in place?

- Financing options
- Engaging with housing nonprofits
- Accessory dwelling unit programs

Additional Discussion Points

The following are in-depth discussion topics with a focus on the relationship between health and buildings, and homes.

- Discuss the relationship between housing and health. Continue this discussion on how opportunities for affordable and other types of housing can be included in the community to ensure housing for all.
- Discuss building features that characterize the community and give the community its identity. Discuss how those features contribute to physical and emotional well-being of residents.
- Discuss how mixed-use development would work in the community context. (More information about mixed-use development can be found in Section 5.1 in *The Guidebook*)
- Discuss the relationship of buildings to the street and impacts on walkability. Discuss what would encourage walkability along streets.
 - Wide or large windows
 - Murals or public art
 - Variety of building colors and materials
- Discuss ways to ensure that future development meets design standards that promote health.
 - Amend plan policies and the zoning code
 - Creating strong community support and advocacy
 - Working with developers that support healthy design
 - Engaging with your local officials
- Discuss how to utilize vacant properties or underutilized space in buildings to improve health and safety.
 - Promote infill on vacant lots
 - Community task force
 - Nonprofit or government organizations or initiatives
 - Community grants

For Further Discussion and Research

- Look into different examples of a community creating a task force to address quality and appearance concerns. Discuss how the community can create a similar task force that provides minor improvements and maintenance of local properties.
- Research how to retrofit homes and buildings in the community to promote energy efficiency and healthy design.
 - Safe and accessible staircases
 - Energy efficient windows and doors
 - Signage encouraging users to take the stairs
 - Additional indoor and outdoor greenery
 - Addition of large windows and doors
 - Courtyards or plazas
 - Addition of ramps
- Research restorative spaces in buildings. Explore how to create and implement restorative spaces in schools, churches, or other public and neutral spaces.
- Research programs that provide home air filtration system or ventilation upgrades and how to connect current residents in need with this opportunity.
- Research building materials and the health benefits or risks related to using certain materials.

Additional Resources



Learn more about BUILDING DESIGN and SUSTAINABLE BUILDING CONSTRUCTION in Section 5 of the *Creating Healthy Places Guidebook*

https://coloradohealthyplaces.org/wp-content/themes/Divi-child/files/Creating-Healthy-Places-Guidebook_Chapter5_Web.pdf



Learn more about COURTYARDS in Section 6 of the *Creating Healthy Places Guidebook*

https://coloradohealthyplaces.org/wp-content/themes/Divi-child/files/Creating-Healthy-Places-Guidebook_Chapter6_Web.pdf

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