Celebrating Our Collective Progress:
10 Years of Healthy Eating and Active Living in New Hampshire
As I reflected upon the growth and achievements of the HEAL network over the past decade, an image came to mind. I was sitting in an upper deck of the Boston University stadium on a late summer evening watching my niece perform in a drum and bugle corps. The band was scattered in groups across the field, marching away from one another in well-ordered fashion. The horns, glittering in the late evening sun, blared away in crisp, clear notes. The ivory white drums were beating out a rumbling rhythm. Then all at once, the groups wheeled around in unison, marched towards the center of the field, and snapped together in one large precision group. The band then struck a single note that slowly increased in volume and pitch until it hit a loud crescendo, suddenly stopped, and echoed across the stadium until it faded away. I felt the sound reverberate as the note rose in pitch and volume. When it stopped, I sat there in awe, spine tingling.

The HEAL network performs in much the same way. Individual coalitions work to advance healthy eating and active living in their communities. Periodically, they come together to share their successes and challenges, while learning from one another. As a whole, the network has had a profound impact on the people and places of our state.

We created this publication to celebrate and showcase the incredible work of the HEAL network through stories and champions. For example, two passionate leaders in Ashland rallied municipal decision makers, residents, and businesses to build a community garden on town land. The garden provides fresh fruits and vegetables to the community and a social gathering place for people of all ages. In another instance, children in the Upper Valley can walk safely on a network of safe routes to school and play built by an energetic collaborative of recreation, health, transportation, community planning professionals, and community members.

There are other examples throughout the state. In Berlin, funds from a HUD Neighborhood Stabilization Project grant are allocated to repurpose a property in a low-income neighborhood to make room for a garden and park. The project sheds a shining light on a community that is recovering from a significant economic downturn and whose population has among the highest rates of morbidity and mortality in the state. An enterprising Regional Planning Commission staffer created a unique method to analyze the safety of existing bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure to pinpoint areas where improvements can be made to make Nashua streets friendlier for all users.

In Wolfeboro, a Huggins Hospital food services director leads the way to increase procurement from local farms and create a healthier hospital food environment for patients, visitors, and employees. In the process, he is contributing to a more sustainable regional food system.

In Laconia, an elementary school teacher leads classroom movement breaks to get students up, active, and reenergized for the rest of the day's lessons. On the state level, a legislative study committee received expert guidance from members of a statewide Complete Streets Coalition and puts forward recommendations for a state-level Complete Streets policy.

On behalf of the HEAL team here at the Foundation for Healthy Communities, I wish to thank our many partners whose contributions make New Hampshire a healthier place to live, learn, work, and play.

Yours in health,

Terry Johnson, Director
Healthy Eating Active Living NH
The Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) NH story began in 2006 when the HNH Foundation, New Hampshire’s leading funder for children’s health, recognized the need for a plan to address the state’s obesity epidemic. At the time, 70% of adults were obese or overweight and nearly 13% of children and adolescents 10 to 17 years old were overweight. The HNH Foundation responded by convening state and regional funders, multi-sector state agencies, and other stakeholders to address the state’s rising obesity rates. Resources were pooled and more than 200 organizations and individuals representing multiple sectors were brought together to develop New Hampshire’s first statewide obesity prevention plan. The HEAL Action Plan was published and the HEAL Initiative launched in 2008. The Foundation for Healthy Communities was selected as the backbone organization for HEAL in 2008 and has served in that capacity since. A second plan, the 2014-2019 Healthy People Healthy Places Plan, was created to build on the foundation established by the HEAL network and accelerate progress achieved on obesity and chronic disease prevention over the first six years.

Over a decade later, the journey continues. HEAL has been sustained due in large part to the HNH Foundation which has contributed over $1.6 million to date. This funding has leveraged more than $995,000 from state, regional, and national funders. HEAL has grown into an expansive network of state- and community-level partners dedicated to improving population health by implementing strategies that provide equitable access to healthy, affordable foods and safe places to play and be active. New Hampshire’s public health challenges are best addressed through partnerships across health, land use and planning, transportation, education, housing, economic development, food systems, and other sectors. The HEAL network has become a model for aligning strategies across sectors to promote healthier people and places.

COMMUNITY IMPACT
The HEAL Community Network consists of 15 coalitions that blanket the state. Led by municipal entities, public health organizations, and health care systems, multi-sector community coalitions reach 68% of New Hampshire’s population and serve 155 of the state’s 234 cities and towns.

The HEAL Community Grant Program (CGP) launched in 2009. Community grantees, as well as non-funded community coalitions, participate in a learning collaborative and receive ongoing training and technical assistance from the Foundation for Healthy Communities. The HEAL Community Network employs best practices to increase access to healthy food and physical activity in municipal, school, early care, health care, and worksite settings. New municipal complete streets policies, menu cueing systems in schools and hospitals, neighborhood park renovations, farmers markets, community gardens, safety improvements along rural and urban trails, healthy food and physical activity standards in early care centers, and Safe Routes to School programs are among the many changes made by HEAL-affiliated coalitions.

Since the beginning of the CGP, HEAL has awarded $780,000 to community grantees, which helped leverage $3.1 million in additional funds. Along with increasing financial and in-kind resources, the HEAL Community Network is sustaining its efforts through policy and systems changes. Examples include the establishment of a HEAL Committee in Ashland under municipal jurisdiction and the integration of a complete streets approach to planning in the Greater Nashua Community Health Improvement Plan.

STATEWIDE IMPACT
HEAL has also made progress at the state level. In 2009, the New Hampshire Commission on the Prevention of Childhood Obesity, working with support from the HEAL Home and its partners, released its signature report. One of the Commission’s recommendations was achieved in 2011 when the New Hampshire State Board of Education adopted new rules requiring school districts to develop standards supporting the availability and distribution of healthy foods and beverages in all venues throughout the school day. Led by Transport NH, Bike-Walk Alliance NH, and HEAL, a statewide Complete Streets Coalition was established in 2015 to advocate for a state-level complete streets policy. The HEAL Active Recreation Workgroup published the Recreation Access in NH Communities report in 2016, setting the stage for the launch of a statewide active recreation advocacy campaign in 2017.
Impact

For over a decade, HEAL has been engaging partners across many sectors, including health, land use and planning, transportation, education, housing, economic development, and food systems. Our partners implement strategies that provide equitable access to healthy, affordable foods and safe places to be active. Here are just a few of the results of these collective efforts.

- **68%** And growing... NH population reached by HEAL
- **50%** Of NH hospitals signed the Healthy Food in Health Care Pledge
- **30%** Decrease in obesity among 3rd graders from 2009-2014
- **87%** Of HEAL coalition members report being actively involved with HEAL strategies
- **87** Partners from 61 organizations joined the Creating Healthy Communities Workshop Series (to date)
- **$3.1 million** Additional funds leveraged by HEAL community grantees

**Convene, Connect, Catalyze for Healthy People & Healthy Places in NH**

- **134,500** NH population reached by communities that adopted complete streets policies
- **15** HEAL coalitions serve 155 of NH’s 234 cities & towns
Nashua HEAL is an excellent example of how community planning and public health have common ground when promoting policies that ensure safe and equitable access to physical activity and healthy eating. The work has also demonstrated that community members from all sectors will come together – from elected officials to residents – because they care about public health, economic growth, and livability. Furthermore, in Nashua and in many other HEAL communities, the great work has continued well after the original funding period.

One of the early projects of Nashua HEAL was the Heritage Rail Trail and community garden project. The project started as a collaboration with the City of Nashua’s Division of Public Health and Community Services and HEAL to bring healthier food options and opportunities for safe physical activity to the Tree Streets Neighborhood.

Residents and organizations in this neighborhood embraced the project, volunteering with the trail clean-up efforts and the build-out of the community garden. A mural from Positive Street Art helped beautify the area around the trail. Once considered unsafe and neglected, now people are on the trail more and growing fresh produce in the garden. Nashua continues to expand efforts around healthy eating and active living. For example, the city has formed a partnership between public health and planning to advance street design that supports health by providing safer and easier ways to get around for pedestrians and bicyclists.

In 2015, the Plan4Health Nashua coalition was formed after receiving a $125,000 grant from the American Planning Association (APA) to help fund a 15-month program to support complete streets planning in Nashua. The project immediately gained support by the Greater Nashua Public Health Advisory Council and is now a priority project for implementation in Nashua’s Community Health Improvement Plan.

"There seems to be more of a sense of community, residents are stopping and having conversations with their neighbors. And neighborhood kids and their families are using the garden and enjoying the Rail Trail more."

Shawn Nelson, Executive Director, Nashua Police Athletic League
Complete Streets
Cities and towns improve walkability to support health and local economy

Whether it’s planting trees, adding crosswalks, making travel lanes narrower, or creating space for people on bikes, communities throughout New Hampshire are using complete streets design standards to make streets safer for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities.

In New Hampshire seven communities have officially adopted complete streets policies: Concord, Dover, Keene, Portsmouth, Swanzey, Hinsdale, and Troy. Even without an official policy in place, there are many New Hampshire communities implementing complete streets standards. For example, Colebrook, a town of 2,300, lacked bicycle lanes and the sidewalks had curbs that required pedestrians to step up, making it difficult for people to get around safely downtown. When the town discovered it needed major infrastructure improvements to the water and sewer system in the Main Street area, it adopted complete streets design elements for no additional cost to the project.

Thanks to these local successes and the efforts of a statewide Complete Streets Coalition led by the Bike-Walk Alliance of NH, Transport NH, and HEAL NH, a Legislative Committee was established in 2016 to examine the possibility of creating a statewide Complete Streets Program. The Committee made two recommendations. The first would direct the NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT) to work with stakeholders to develop formalized criteria and a guidebook to aid municipalities in implementing complete streets projects. The second would authorize $2.5 million to establish a Complete Streets Pilot Program to evaluate the effectiveness of the new criteria and guidebook and NHDOT’s technical assistance with local projects.

There are a number of reasons communities are adopting complete streets policies. They support the safety, health and well-being of community members. A 2016 Southwest Region Planning Commission Safe Routes to School study showed that the number of children walking to school at one Keene elementary school increased from 11% to 26% following improvements in sidewalk infrastructure. Complete streets also create economic opportunity through increased tourism and retail sales, as well as attracting skilled, young workers who prefer to live and work where they can walk, bike, and take transit. Having complete streets policies in place can actually save municipalities money in the long run by preventing costly delays and retrofits.

“When it comes to economic development, often overlooked is improving the ‘walkability’ of an area whose economic development prospects you would like to enhance. Data show that things like wide, pedestrian-friendly sidewalks, enhanced crosswalks, and public art will attract people to nearby stores and restaurants.”

Will Stewart, President, Greater Derry Londonderry Chamber of Commerce

Concord downtown revitalization

Chestnut Street Bicycle Lane Pilot in Manchester
From its inception in 2014, Ashland HEAL has had strong community support for work to improve access to options for healthy eating and safe physical activity. The coalition has worked on several strategies with partners who include representatives from the Town of Ashland and the local school system, local restaurant and business owners, residents, members of parks and recreation, local bike/pedestrian committee members, and health care professionals from Speare Memorial Hospital.

One of the coalition’s first projects was to develop a community garden with 15 raised garden beds on a piece of land that was unused by the town. Much of the supplies and labor were donated by individuals and companies. Ashland HEAL leveraged $3,500 of additional funding for the garden through a community grant from the Meredith Village Saving Bank. In its second year, Ashland HEAL received a $5,000 grant from the Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Foundation to support the community garden, allowing for the purchase of fencing, a shed, and a lawn mower. The garden has expanded to 20 raised garden beds and three 50’ x 4’ beds for communal planting. Ashland’s community garden has become a hub of the community that welcomes community members of all ages.

Since the HEAL initiative, Ashland town officials have started incorporating HEAL concepts into their work. Ashland HEAL has become an official town committee, allowing HEAL to remain visible in the community and the town to sanction future healthy eating and active living initiatives. For instance, the Ashland HEAL Committee is supporting the Whitten Woods Project to convert 440 acres to conservation land to be used for recreation and hiking. The Bike/Pedestrian Committee was formed to improve the town of Ashland’s walking and biking infrastructure. The Ashland Board of Selectmen have also started a Transportation Advisory Committee to help the town ensure that all modes of transportation and the needs of all users are considered.

With this new “complete streets” way of thinking, the town is developing a sidewalk project that considers safe access for pedestrians and bicyclists in street improvements, rather than just repaving the sidewalks when needed, as had been done in the past. Ashland will also develop a comprehensive transportation plan that will prioritize street projects over the next several years.
The Upper Valley HEAL coalition has adopted an ambitious and comprehensive approach to creating meaningful change across multiple sectors, including schools, primary care practices, worksites, early care centers, and municipalities. Reducing childhood obesity has been a primary focus for the coalition. Interventions in schools have reached over 3,100 students total in the Lebanon and Mascoma school districts. More than 500 children have been reached through the Nutrition and Physical Activity Assessment in Child Care Centers program across nine early care sites. Over 15,000 children and families have participated in HEAL interventions in recreation centers across the region.

Creating healthier food environments in institutions is one area in which Upper Valley HEAL has excelled. Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center (DHMC) has a long history of instituting policies for healthy living for their employees, patients, and community members. But their move to stop selling sugar-sweetened beverages – including soda and sports drinks – caused considerable debate on and off their Lebanon campus when they introduced the policy in early 2012.

Evidence shows a direct correlation between sugar-sweetened beverages, obesity, and a number of diseases such as diabetes and hypertension.

“Our goal is to change the environment so it is easier to consume healthier foods and beverages,” said Deborah Keane, Director of Food & Nutrition Services and member of the Healthy Living Committee at DHMC. “Research shows that this will lead to long-term changes in diet, and a healthier workforce and community in the long run.”

Keane said she has noticed that employees who would typically drink soda are now drinking more water and milk; sales of plain water increased over 30%, and sales of milk increased approximately 15% as compared to before the elimination of sugar-sweetened beverages.
2006-2007
- HNH Foundation convenes funders and 200+ stakeholders come together to develop HEAL Action Plan to address NH’s obesity epidemic

2008
- HEAL Initiative launched
- First statewide HEAL conference held

2009
- HEAL Community Grant Program Round 1 with $500,000 awarded to 4 communities: Upper Valley, Cheshire County, Lakes Region and Greater Franklin
- NH Commission on the Prevention of Childhood Obesity Report released

2011
- HEAL communities implement CATCH Kids Club in after school programs (helped achieve 108 programs in NH in 5 years)
- NH Board of Education approves new minimum standards for healthy foods and beverages in schools
- Thornton’s Ferry Elementary School receives first HEAL Education in Excellence Award
- Cheshire County HEAL launches Turn A New Leaf healthy menu labeling program

2012
- Dartmouth Medical Center becomes first NH hospital to adopt a campus-wide policy prohibiting the sale of sugary beverages
- Upper Valley HEAL completes Mascoma River Greenway Action Plan and launches fundraising campaign

2008
- HEAL Initiative launched
- First statewide HEAL conference held

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2012
- Dartmouth Medical Center becomes first NH hospital to adopt a campus-wide policy prohibiting the sale of sugary beverages
- Upper Valley HEAL completes Mascoma River Greenway Action Plan and launches fundraising campaign
2013
- HEAL partners with Health Care Without Harm to launch NH Healthy Food in Health Care program
- Nashua HEAL establishes community garden adjacent to Heritage Rail Trail

2014
- Healthy People Healthy Places Plan for NH released
- HEAL awards $140,000 in active transportation grant funds to 10 communities
- Active Recreation Workgroup established and Active Recreation Inventory and Access Project begins in 10 of NH’s higher-need communities
- HEAL Active Transportation Program launched

2015
- Lakes Region HEAL completes Wyatt Park revitalization in Laconia
- Greater Franklin HEAL establishes farmers market at Franklin Regional Hospital
- Ashland becomes first NH town to establish a HEAL Committee under municipal jurisdiction
- Berlin HEAL repurposes property to build Friendship Park & Community Garden

2016
- HEAL Community Network increases to 15 coalitions
- HEAL Active Recreation Inventory poster presented at RWJF Active Living Research Conference
- Legislative Complete Streets Committee established, develops recommendations for state-level complete streets policy
- HEAL completes Healthy Food Access Assessment and Inventory project

Plan4Health Nashua receives National Association of Development Directors award
After years of disrepair, community residents led by the Odell Park Centennial Committee and supported by Greater Franklin HEAL came together to restore the park to its former glory and give residents a vibrant community resource with opportunities for safe physical activity. Today, you can see people walking and using the exercise equipment, artists, and children celebrating birthdays in the park that was once run down, unsafe, and plagued by vandalism.

HEAL facilitated similar renovations at two other parks, Daniell Park in Franklin and Kelly Park in Bristol. It also supported improvements to trails within the region; the Northern Rail Trail, New Hampshire’s longest rail trail, was extended four miles, and the Winnipesaukee River Trail was extended one mile.

In addition to their support for healthy, safe parks, the HEAL coalition responded to various assessments that indicated it was difficult for many to access healthy food in Franklin, particularly for the area’s most vulnerable populations. Through a grant from Franklin Savings Bank and a partnership with the Belknap-Merrimack County Community Action Program and TRIP (Twin Rivers Intergenerational Program) Senior Program Center, the coalition offered a free, scheduled route to the Franklin Farmers Market for the first time in 2016.

At the farmers market, HEAL representatives informed market-goers using Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or EBT cards that they could get up to $20 in fruits and vegetables through the Granite State Market Match Program and that SNAP dollars could be doubled at the Franklin Farmers Market. Franklin HEAL also sponsors Harvest Boxes, which offer free leftover produce grown in the Paul Smith Elementary School community garden. One other healthy food opportunity is being incorporated in the doctor’s office through a fruits and vegetables prescription program.

HEAL’s work continues in the Greater Franklin area as the coalition and its community partners implement more healthy eating and active living initiatives. “The HEAL coalition has brought together many different types of organizations and businesses that are now focused on promoting healthy eating and physical activity,” says Krystal Alpers, Director of Franklin Parks and Recreation Department.
Several schools from the Laconia School District have added ‘Movement Breaks’ into the classroom. These two-minute breaks throughout the school day are incorporated into math, reading, and other curricula.

Movement Breaks, a strategy developed by Winnipesaukee Public Health Network, occur throughout the school day. Teachers like it because it is flexible and easy to integrate into the classroom. Students love it because it’s fun and keeps them engaged.

Not only are students becoming more active as a result of the Movement Breaks, it’s enhancing the learning process according to several teachers at Woodland Heights Elementary School.

In the partnership’s early days, former Laconia School District superintendent Bob Champlin was a big supporter of Movement Breaks, encouraging them to be used as part of their ongoing efforts to integrate physical activity and nutrition into the curriculum.

“We take small steps and celebrate each milestone along the way,” explains Champlin. “You have to know who your partners are and how they can help. The HEAL partnership has been critical for our school district.”

The City of Laconia, led by its Parks & Recreation Department, received a HEAL community grant in 2012 to help revitalize Wyatt Park in the South End neighborhood. Safety and access to the park were some of the top concerns voiced by the community during several forums conducted by the city and HEAL over nine months. The city brought in the Department of Public Works (DPW) to help address these issues. The DPW placed the project to the front of the line and added more than $15,000 to include extra safety and accessibility improvements, including ADA-compliant tip-downs for the crosswalks.

According to DPW Director, Paul Moynihan, “We had recently done road upgrades on the street sections adjacent to Wyatt Park, but we hadn’t addressed accessibility improvements to the adjacent sidewalk. The HEAL Grant initiative prompted us to revisit the pedestrian and active transportation needs at this site and to broaden our view to accomplish similar improvements on other city roadway upgrade projects in the future.”

When the City Council realized the support and momentum the park was receiving by the community, it allocated $50,000 for improvements to Wyatt Park.

The project is an excellent example of how a community working together can create a safe place for residents to get together, enjoy the outside, and be active.
For over a year, the HEAL Active Recreation Workgroup conducted an inventory of public recreation spaces in 10 of New Hampshire’s highest need communities. The resulting report, *Recreation Access in NH Communities*, was released in late 2016.

The first of its kind in New Hampshire, this report inventories publicly accessible park and recreation spaces in 10 communities including Berlin, Claremont, Colebrook, Concord, Hampton, Haverhill, Manchester, Nashua, Salem, and Winchester. These communities were identified by location (urban and rural settings) and certain socioeconomic and health indicators using the NH DHHS Social Vulnerability Index (SVI). Active recreation areas were then mapped for each community and visual data analysis was conducted using Geographic Information Science (GIS). The inventory was the first phase of work being done by the Active Recreation Workgroup to help increase equitable access to indoor and outdoor recreation facilities throughout the Granite State, one of the primary objectives outlined in the 2014-2019 Healthy People Healthy Places Plan.

According to Beth Gustafson Wheeler, MS, Director of Community Health at the Foundation for Healthy Communities and Workgroup lead, “An amazing group of people have come to the table and brought the resources of their organizations to get this work done. For this phase, Workgroup members worked to complete the project with the help of students and faculty at Plymouth State University and University of New Hampshire who conducted the inventory. Workgroup members then met with recreation directors and town officials to vet the data and start to formulate a picture of what recreation access looks like in these 10 communities.”

The report’s findings have important implications for active living, economic growth, and the well-being of people in these communities. Recreation spaces serve as places for residents to be physically active and forge social connections. Living in close proximity to parks is an important predictor of physical activity. In New Hampshire, local and regional park spending resulted in $212,896,528 of economic activity (transactions), $71,496,917 in labor income, and contributed 1,930 jobs in 2013. Further economic benefits of parks and open space can be linked to their impact on property values: parks and open spaces attract homebuyers and are shown to increase property values, encouraging economic development.

The Active Recreation Workgroup is actively pursuing funding opportunities to 1) promote and support the implementation of community engagement projects in the 10 target communities; 2) support recreation and park improvement projects in New Hampshire’s most vulnerable communities; and 3) assist recreation champions and stakeholders in advocating for increases in funding to improve safe access to and participation in active recreation.
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) highlighted the work being done to improve employee health in Cheshire County, crediting a local HEAL community coalition and the Healthy Monadnock Champions program for starting the initiative.

According to the CDC, employer based wellness programs may have great impact on the health of the community, potentially reaching most adults in Cheshire County; there are approximately 45,000 working-age adults in Cheshire County, and a particularly low unemployment rate of about 5%.

More than 1,900 individuals and 80 organizations are currently registered in Healthy Monadnock, a community-wide initiative to improve the overall health and well-being of citizens in the Monadnock region. The initiative aspires to lead the region to the status of “the healthiest community in the nation” by the year 2020.

Employers have been a priority audience since Healthy Monadnock’s inception in 2006. In 2012, the local HEAL community coalition partnered with Healthy Monadnock and started using the CDC Worksite Health ScoreCard with the initiative’s Organizational Champions. The ScoreCard is a tool to assess and expand worksite wellness programs. Approximately 15 employers with over 4,000 employees are now using the ScoreCard, with many more employers expected to participate as they come on board as Healthy Monadnock Champions. This workplace wellness initiative was initially introduced through a pilot program of Healthy Monadnock in 2008.

Healthy Monadnock has expanded its work with employers in unique ways. In 2015, the Cheshire County Conservation District, a Healthy Monadnock partner, launched the Monadnock Menus program. Monadnock Menus aggregates and delivers local agricultural products to businesses and other institutions. In addition to providing healthy local foods to institutions, Monadnock Menus supports local farmers whose products can be ordered wholesale in an online marketplace and distributed weekly for kitchen production.

Healthy Monadnock continues to be a member of the HEAL Community Network.
The City of Manchester’s partners, including government agencies, nonprofits, health care institutions, resident groups, and businesses have a long history of implementing neighborhood-based programs to address emerging concerns and improve health. When, despite the city’s efforts, health and socioeconomic outcomes continued to trend in the wrong direction, the Manchester Health Department and its many partners decided to go door-to-door with surveys and hold public forums to collect feedback that informed its 2014 Neighborhood Health Improvement Strategy. The plan prominently positioned socioeconomic factors—such as poverty—as the focus of its recommendations, called for collective action through multi-sector partnerships, and identified proven strategies for improving outcomes and changing systems. These efforts earned Manchester the Culture of Health Prize Winner from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in 2016.

Manchester has taken place-based approaches to population health working to improve access to active recreation opportunities in neighborhoods within the city. For example, abandoned railway beds have been transformed into walking and biking trails using a combination of public and private funding. The city and nonprofit groups like Manchester Moves are working towards the completion of a network of trails that will connect with the city’s downtown and nearby towns. The Hands Over the Merrimack Bridge—a rehabilitated rail bridge dedicated in 2012—is part of that network allowing a safe place for pedestrians and bicyclists to cross the river.

Another example is improving access to daily active play-time for students. At Beech Street Elementary School students had to cross a busy street to enjoy recess, using a local park as their school playground. In 2015, Elliot Health System assisted with funding to support the construction of a new school playground, which serves the school’s 600 students.

In 2016, the Manchester Police Athletic League’s Community Center underwent a $1.8 million renovation funded by the community collaborative Building On Hope. The city recently updated Oak Park with input from residents. According to Jaime Hoebeke, head of the Health Department’s Division of Neighborhood Health, “The neighborhood didn’t want to cut trees for one giant playground. They wanted to embrace nature.” So, in Oak Park, there are no slides or swings; instead, big toadstools and metal trees mimicking nature to offer children opportunities to jump and climb.

"We try to respond proactively to residents needs, rather than reactively."
Anna Thomas, Deputy Public Health Director, City of Manchester
Berlin HEAL
Community gardens built to meet “growing” needs of residents

Berlin HEAL coalition repurposed a property on the corner of Mason and Granite Streets in downtown Berlin, demolishing a dilapidated apartment building to make room for a community garden and neighborhood park. This project represents a bright light in a community that has experienced a significant economic downturn in the past few decades.

This project was unique because the HEAL partners located in Berlin, including representatives from recreation, housing, community planning, health care, schools, and others, were the ones who decided to start a community garden. However, this decision was based on the feedback and direction of community residents. The coalition held forums in the community where residents shared their experiences and made their voices and opinions heard.

Angela Martin-Giroux, Berlin’s Administrator of Welfare and Health Officer, and lead HEAL partner, said, “Through Berlin HEAL’s community meetings, residents told us they wanted community garden space closer to the downtown. With the help of citywide partners and community members, we are able to create that space!”

The group allocated a piece of land within a low-income neighborhood that is in the process of being completely revitalized. HEAL acquired funding from an existing Neighborhood Stabilization Project grant from HUD—an example of matching existing funds with a designated project. “The nice thing about this project is that it has provided the neighborhood with a place to play, socialize, and be active as well as a place for them to grow their own food,” says Beth Gustafson Wheeler, Director of Community Health at HEAL.

The initial garden at the newly created Friendship Park was built with 10 raised beds. Two of the beds have ADA-compliant transfer benches for gardeners in wheelchairs to use. The gardens are being used primarily by residents of the immediate neighborhood. In addition, two of the plots are being used by Community Service Center, an organization that assists developmentally disabled adults. Another bed is being used for youth and family educational activities that are organized by the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC).

Additional funding from local sources, as well as from a Harvard Pilgrim Healthy Food Fund Grant, have enabled the project to continue to thrive and grow to more neighborhoods in Berlin. There are now four sites, including three parks, that are currently being used for community gardens in Berlin which have been an overwhelming success with the residents.

The goal is for the Berlin HEAL community garden and park project to be an inspiration and model to move similar projects forward throughout the city. There are ongoing efforts to increase access to active living, with open spaces and playgrounds. Long-term plans include implementing a complete streets approach for the city, making it more easily walkable to schools and markets, and making streets safer for all users of the roads.
Looking Forward

Convening partners for a total population health approach

The Foundation for Healthy Communities team has been honored to serve as the HEAL Home for these many years. We were aware from the beginning that reversing our state’s obesity epidemic would be a daunting and long-term endeavor. We have focused our energies on building and sustaining a strong collaborative network and catalyzing efforts to pursue a common vision to create healthier people and places throughout our state, while prioritizing communities and populations most in need. Thanks to the firm commitments and passions of our HEAL network partners a sturdy foundation has been established to carry the work forward.

This year, the Foundation for Healthy Communities will roll out a new Total Population Health Initiative to advance our vision that all New Hampshire residents achieve their highest potential for health and well-being. Our goal is to convene stakeholders and leaders, including our HEAL partners, to develop and implement a consensus approach to support the advancement of population health in the next 3 to 5 years. The HEAL model to target the social determinants of health, integrate health across sectors, create meaningful change in our communities to support healthy choices, and advance equity for all, will become a vital component of our new total population health approach.

As such, we will continue to prioritize HEAL within our total population health initiative. The work of HEAL and its rich collection of successes, best practices, and lessons learned will be critical as we embark on the total population health initiative. Areas within HEAL that will remain a priority include:

- **The HEAL Community Network:** We will continue to convene our partners to share best practices and identify synergies in our work to move HEAL forward and catalyze change.
- **The work of the Active Recreation Workgroup:** We will continue to work together and, with our partners, advocate for improved access to recreation by engaging residents and providing a platform to raise their voices to call attention to the needs and issues surrounding recreation in their communities.

In other areas, we will look to the *2017 HEAL Healthy Food and Food Access Assessment and Inventory* as a roadmap to further promote and elevate food systems work and promote healthy eating projects across the HEAL network. We will also continue to support the work of Health Care Without Harm, a valuable partner who is making great strides with the NH Healthy Food in Health Care Working Group established in 2013.

In areas where we serve as a co-leader, such as active transportation, healthy food access, and healthy food in health care, we will work to maintain our partner connections and support ongoing efforts as we can. We will look to our partners to help carry on the work, secure new resources, and sustain HEAL in communities and state-level initiatives. Such collaboration has been the hallmark of HEAL since its inception and will continue to help HEAL thrive into the future.

We wish to thank all of our partners for their dedication to HEAL and the Foundation for Healthy Communities and look forward to continued collaboration on creating a culture of health throughout our state.
Acknowledgements

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HNH Foundation
Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation
Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Foundation
Endowment for Health
NH Charitable Foundation

HEAL Community and Statewide Partners

AARP NH
Adaptive Sports Partners of the North Country
Allgood Eats Local
American Cancer Society
American Heart Association
Antioch New England
Appalachian Mountain Club
Bike-Walk Alliance of NH
Capital Area Wellness Coalition
Central NH Planning Commission
Central NH Regional Public Health Network
Cheshire Medical Center/Dartmouth-Hitchcock Keene
Children’s Hospital at Dartmouth
Citizens Health Initiative
City of Berlin
City of Concord
City of Laconia
City of Lebanon
City of Manchester
City of Nashua
Community Health Institute
Concord Hospital
Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center
Franklin Regional Hospital
Foundation for Seacoast Health
Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth
GP Red
Granite State Independent Living
Greater Derry Londonderry Chamber of Commerce
Greater Nashua Public Health Network
Health First Family Care Center for Children and Families
Health Promotion Research Center at Dartmouth
HealthTrust
Laconia School District
Lakes Region Partnership for Public Health
LRG Healthcare
Manchester Health Department
Media Power Youth
Merrimack County Conservation District
Merrimack Valley Child Care Center
Nashua Regional Planning Commission
Nashua School District
N.E. Coalition for Health Promotion & Disease Prevention
New London Hospital
NH Community Loan Fund
NH Comprehensive Cancer Collaborative
NH Department of Agriculture, Markets & Food
NH Department of Education
NH Department of Environmental Services
NH Department of Health & Human Services
NH Department of Transportation
NH Division of Parks and Recreation
NH Employment Security
NH Fish and Game Department
NH Food Alliance
NH Food Bank
NH Governor’s Council on Physical Activity and Health
NH Health & Equity Partnership
NH Housing Finance Authority
NH Hospital Association
NH Hunger Solutions
NH Parks & Recreation Association
NH Public Health Association
North Country Health Consortium
Northern Community Investment Corporation
Nutrition In Motion, LLC
Nutrition Works! LLC
Plan NH
PlusTime NH
Plymouth State University
Seacoast Public Health Network
Southern NH Planning Commission
Southwest Region Planning Commission
Speare Memorial Hospital
Strafford County Public Health Network
Town of Ashland
Town of Colebrook
Town of Moultonborough Recreation Department
Transport NH
UNH Carsey Institute
UNH College of Health and Human Services
UNH Cooperative Extension
UNH Institute on Disability
UNH Sustainability Institute
Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission
White Mountain Valley Community Health Council
Winnipesaukee Regional Public Health Network
Wyatt Park Association
10 Years of Healthy Eating and Active Living in New Hampshire