SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT & ITS RELATION TO HEALTH BENEFITS

Climate change is not only affecting our planet but also our health. As part of California’s integrated plan for addressing the greenhouse gas reduction law, AB 32, and the Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008, known as SB 375, the Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities (AHSC) program was developed to fund grants and loans for “land-use, housing, transportation, and land preservation projects to support infill and compact development that reduce greenhouse gas ("GHG") emissions” (SGC). AHSC is just one of California’s incentive programs to help achieve the GHG levels and in addition it comes with health co-benefits as part of the plan to incentivize grant program applicants. However, AHSC program only keeps track of the health co-benefits associated with each funded project but there is no health related metrics to know project’s effectiveness and effect on health.

In contrast, the Conservation Law Foundation (CLF) and the Massachusetts Housing Investment Corporation (MHIC) have proposed the creation of a $30 million private equity fund model, HNEF, which considers the community, environmental, and health benefits of a proposed project as well as the financial risks and returns. HNEF is tracking project’s effectiveness and effects on health through health-related metrics.

OBJECTIVE

How programs such as HNEF in Massachusetts assess project’s effectiveness and impact on health outcomes over time and how can a program like AHSC start tracking effectiveness and impact on health outcomes over time?

KEY FINDINGS

- AHSC only reviews project’s health co-benefits with no monitoring/not using health metrics.
- HNEF has invested into a Health Impact Assessment to develop 12 health determinants using health-related metrics to assess project’s effectiveness and impact on health outcomes over time.
- Using HNEF’s model, AHSC already collects information on 9 of 12 health determinants, except on safety from crime, social cohesion, and environmental contamination.
- See Figure 3 for the 3 feasible health determinants AHSC is already focusing but not monitoring → policy suggestions.

GOING FORWARD

- Implication: AHSC is only a 2 year old program with a more direct focus on Governor, "Jerry" Brown’s plan to reduce GHS levels and is not particularly part of monitoring Californians’ health.
- Implication: Changes to the AHSC’s metrics in particular adding health-related metrics to track funded project’s effectiveness and effects on health had potential debatable because AHSC’s objective and goals was is focused on reducing GHG levels.
- Implication: AHSC project awardees have a contract of three years with the State government and after the contract is over there is no need to report any information back to the state.
- Limitation: Difficult to come up with health metrics that are affordable, feasible, and fast for a 3 year project contract.
- Suggestion: AHSC should consider the 3 health determinants, health determinant metric, recommended data sources, recommendations, and proposed potential health impacts to be part of their scoring for future grant applicants to monitor project’s co-benefits and its effectiveness and effects on health because climate change and the build environment affects the health of individuals.
- Ask for the other 9 suggested health metrics*
Combating Climate Change through Sustainable Development: A comparative analysis of Massachusetts’ Health Impact Assessment and California’s Co-benefits

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