Research shows that chronic diseases of the 21st century—from heart disease and obesity to cancer and more—are directly affected by how we design, build and sustain our environments. People who live in isolated communities, without sufficient health and community resources, struggle to maintain healthy lifestyles and preventive measures to avoid chronic illnesses. Healthy communities should include the following elements:

- Access to affordable healthcare;
- Natural resource preservation;
- Livable wage jobs;
- Safe neighborhoods;
- Affordable housing;
- Quality education;
- Multi-modal transportation;
- Healthy food access;
- Artistic expression;
- Entrepreneurship; and
- Social capital.

Creating communities that are conscious of health equity and environmental health concerns requires collaboration among policymakers, government agencies, researchers, communities and health specialists with interdisciplinary perspectives.

A PEORIA–AREA PARTNERSHIP

Building Healthy Communities is a cross-sector partnership comprised of local healthcare providers, government agencies, the Peoria City/County Health Department, and other organizations focused on community reinvestment in Peoria’s urban core. This partnership is committed to strengthening the health of our underserved communities by ensuring access to healthcare, improving conditions for health and equity, and advancing the future of community health through social and economic opportunities.

Good health, of course, extends well beyond the doctor’s office and the hospital. It begins with a healthy environment: fresh fruits and vegetables in neighborhood stores and gardens, successful schools and safe streets, accessible parks and playgrounds.

Each of the communities in which we operate have unique needs, stories and opportunities to advance health and equity. Peoria’s urban core, for example, has a surplus of housing. However, this housing must be affordable, safe and stable to have a considerable impact on an individual’s health and well-being.

Neighborhoods must have access to resources in order to manage chronic diseases and provide education, employment opportunities and a sense of community. Although childhood and adolescent obesity is prevalent in many urban and rural neighborhoods, it can be prevented through a variety of interventions related to healthy food access and consumption, the ability to walk or bike to school, and regular active play.

BUILDING TOGETHER

The Partnership for a Healthy Community (healthyhoi.org) is currently developing the 2020–2022 Comprehensive Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) for central Illinois. Its interventions will go far beyond normative health practices to include proven cross-sector strategies that provide community support to healthcare providers throughout the Tri-County region.

To build healthy communities together, we need to first include CHIP health improvement strategies in all community, social and economic strategic plans. Then we must work collaboratively to provide comprehensive services, access and resources to all health populations—particularly those struggling with the social and economic determinants of health. We can achieve the goal of healthy people in healthy communities when we affirmatively agree that all citizens of central Illinois have a fair and just right to be healthy and grow.

LOCAL FOODS, LOCAL PLACES

To learn more about Building Healthy Communities’ projects and plans, plan to attend “Local Foods, Local Places” on May 22–23, 2019 at 1312 SW Adams St. The event will bring together community stakeholders to identify strategies for enhancing local healthy food systems in the Peoria area. For more information, visit pcchd.org.