

Suzanne Haydu, RD, MPH Supporting Systems and Environmental Change Programs in California

Improving California's Built Environment

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) allocates Title V Block Grant funds to support Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health (MCAH) programs in the state's 61 Local Health Departments (LHDs). In California, LHD MCAH programs implement interventions designed to improve the health of California's women of reproductive age, infants, children, adolescents and their families. These interventions include projects that promote environmental changes to improve nutrition, increase physical activity, and support breastfeeding.

Suzanne Haydu, RD, MPH, is the Nutrition and Physical Activity Coordinator for MCAH at CDPH. Suzanne sought to address LHD MCAH programs' need for information on how to address the maternal, child, and adolescent population's many health status deficiencies related to nutrition, physical activity, and breastfeeding by improving California's built environment. The built environment — roads, sidewalks, housing, even parks — has a significant affect on people's health.

Suzanne found that there is a plethora of resources on improving the built environment. In fact, the sheer volume of information and tools is overwhelming! But no toolkit, website or central location existed that was tailored specifically to help local MCAH directors to be collectively involved in developing and implementing systems and environmental changes.

Suzanne proctored Jenny Wong, then an MPH graduate student at the University of California–Davis as an intern with CDPH's MCAH Division. Jenny received support from a Blueprint Collaborative mini-grant from the Association of State Public Health Nutritionists (ASPHN). Jenny's internship was to create an online toolkit that highlights successful built environment projects that LHD MCAH programs can replicate and adapt for their communities.

Jenny reviewed the environmental change projects that LHD MCAH programs had developed to date to improve nutrition, increase physical activity, and support breastfeeding in their communities. Suzanne identified and Jenny then interviewed experts in a number of CDPH divisions as well as outside partners to get their ideas and suggestions for developing this new online tool. Jenny's interviews included CDPH staff in Network for a



Pictured: Suzanne Haydu, RD, MPH

About Suzanne

Suzanne has served as the Nutrition and Physical Activity Coordinator for CDPH's MCAH Division for nearly two decades. Suzanne is passionate about collaboration and about breastfeeding promotion. She is proud that she was instrumental in establishing a statewide breastfeeding promotion advisory committee and developing and producing two California breastfeeding reports. Suzanne is ASPHN's immediate past president, and she was a founding member of the ASPHN Maternal and Child Health Nutrition Council.

As a Peace Corps volunteer from 1979 to 1981, Suzanne trained Farm Home Instructresses in Malawi and developed and conducted a national evaluation of the program that led to its expansion.

Suzanne enjoys her free time as an abstract watercolor painter and doing hot yoga. She most enjoys traveling to remote parts of the world.

Healthy California, the California Obesity Prevention Program, the Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, California Active Communities, and the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Division, among others.

Jenny also interviewed staff at ChangeLab Solutions. ChangeLab develops community-based approaches to improving people’s health. In addition, Jenny spoke with five city and county LHD MCAH program directors who were implementing environmental change interventions in their communities. Jenny asked about their needs and what would be most helpful for them in an online toolkit.

Successes and Major Outcomes

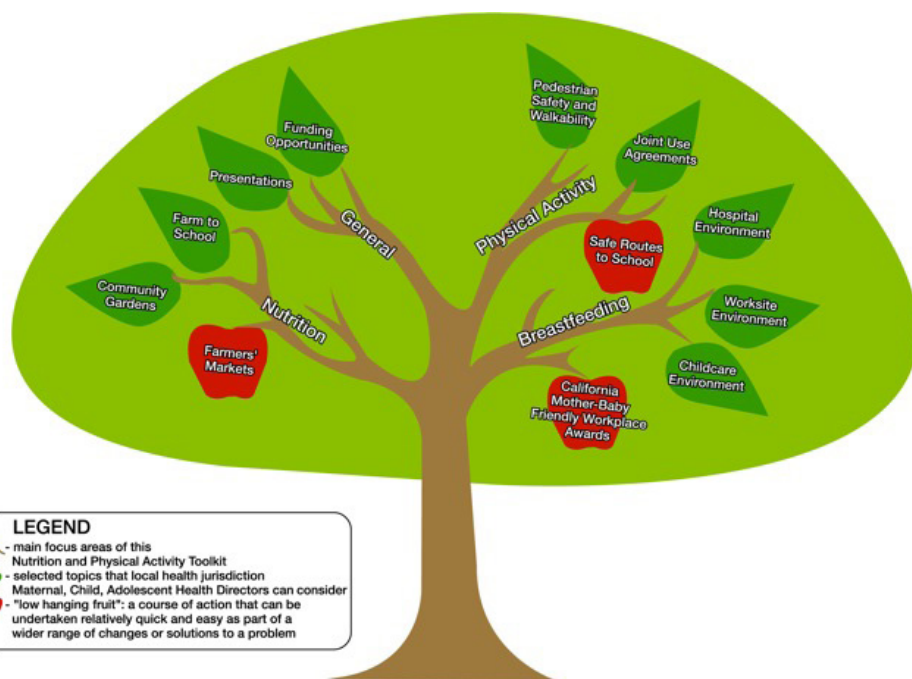
The online toolkit, **Systems and Environmental Changes for Nutrition and Activity**, went live late 2012. The site graphically presents a tree with branches, leaves and fruit that link to built environment resources and model programs specifically for local MCAH staff. The nutrition branch includes links to community gardens, farmers’ markets, and farm to school programs as well as cross-cutting topics like the Retail Food Environment Index and healthy eating research. The physical activity branch features walkability, joint use agreements, safe routes to school and additional links. The breastfeeding branch highlights childcare, worksite and hospital environments. The general branch includes funding opportunities, presentations, and much more. Each branch features one county’s success story.

The Important Role of the Public Health Nutritionist

Suzanne designed the project and provided leadership. She also served as a mentor for Jenny, who conducted the informational interviews, wrote a background document for the webpage, and designed and developed the layout and content of the webpage for high usability. Both Suzanne and Jenny planned and presented on the webinar.

As a public health nutritionist, Suzanne understood that local MCAH Directors were already involved in collective impact work to implement some systems and environmental change strategies to improve health outcomes for Californians. But she also believed that they could do more, especially collaborating to change the built environments in their communities. Suzanne brought her knowledge of how built environments can impact nutrition, physical activity and breastfeeding to this project.

Suzanne and Jenny hoped the MCAH directors would see themselves and their staff as change agents in improving the built environment.



To spread the word about the new toolkit to the local MCAH staff and get them excited about using it, Suzanne and Jenny held a **webinar** in December 2012. The webinar was primarily to educate local MCAH staff to better understand how our environments can affect nutrition, breastfeeding and physical activity. Moreover, they hoped the MCAH directors would see themselves and their staff as change agents in improving the built environment.

On the webinar, Richard Jackson, MD, MPH presented an overview of what the built environment is, and how systems and environmental changes can improve the health of the MCAH population. Dr. Jackson is a professor and Chair of the Environmental Health Sciences Department at UCLA. The webinar also highlighted two local MCAH built environment success stories, one in Los Angeles County and one in Mono County. Also on the webinar, Suzanne and Jenny outlined what was in the new online toolkit and how local MCAH programs can use the resources to launch new built environment projects in their health jurisdictions. Approximately 150 people attended the webinar, including staff from other CDPH programs as well as local MCAH Directors.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Building the toolkit webpage proved to be a challenge. The use of a graphic with three clickable branches, leaves and fruit was a unique approach to a CDPH webpage. Through persistence and a very helpful CDPH webmaster, Suzanne and Jenny were able to create a site that they were proud to present to the MCAH community.

From the feedback Suzanne and Jenny received, they learned that MCAH Directors did not all know that they already were doing work in systems and environmental change and that built environment strategies and approaches so easily fit with their deliverables. For example, some MCAH Directors were already working to promote lactation accommodation facilities, establish farmer's markets, promote physical activity venues in the health jurisdiction, and more.



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ASPHN in Action

ASPHN is a non-profit membership organization that provides state and national leadership on food and nutrition policy, programs and services aimed at improving the health of our population. Our vision is to create new environmental norms where healthy eating and active living are the easy and natural choices for all Americans.

At ASPHN, we build our members' skills as public health nutritionists by providing key resources and professional development.

To learn more about ASPHN, please visit us on the web at www.asphn.org.