City Health Priorities

The 2015 City of Cambridge Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) recognizes that health begins in homes, schools, and neighborhoods. Led by the health department, this five-year initiative has brought together over 30 city agencies and community organizations to address the following priority areas: healthy eating and active living; mental health and substance abuse; violence; and housing.

Healthy Eating and Active Living
Cambridge has made substantial progress in creating a healthy, sustainable, and equitable food and fitness environment throughout the city. Recent accomplishments include the integration of healthy eating and active living strategies into the city’s early childhood and transportation plans; establishing the Cambridge Food and Fitness Policy Council; introducing salad bars and international cuisine in school cafeterias; launching a popular bike-share program; renovating city parks and playgrounds; and creating a safer environment for walking and biking.

HIGHLIGHTS
To address food insecurity, the school district secured funding to serve free “breakfast in the classroom” to all Fletcher Maynard Academy students, and the Cambridge SNAP Match Coalition raised $22,000 in 2016 to help residents with low incomes buy food at Cambridge farmers markets.

The city launched the Safe Routes to School program, which promotes safe walking and biking to school; and released The Cambridge Bicycle Plan.

The city formally adopted two transportation policies in 2016. Vision Zero aims to eliminate death and serious injury from traffic accidents. Complete Streets will make it safer to walk, bike, drive, or take public transit.

City staff began drafting a comprehensive urban agriculture policy.

31% of Cambridge residents walk or bike to work.¹

Obesity among Cambridge public school children (K–8) decreased from 21% in 2004² to 14% in 2015.³

Mental Health and Substance Abuse
Many service providers and residents have voiced concern about the prevalence of mental illness and addiction in Cambridge; the cost and availability of services; and how stigma and other underlying issues may keep people from seeking help. With regard to substance abuse, CHIP partners will continue to help people overcome addiction, train bystanders on how to respond to an overdose, address underage drinking and prescription drug misuse in youth, and expand opportunities for medication disposal.

HIGHLIGHTS
OPEN (Overdose Prevention and Education Network) provided timely information to the community about opioid prevention, intervention, and treatment.

The city collected over 9,800 pounds of unwanted medication.

The health department began implementing two federal grants aimed at reducing prescription drug misuse and underage drinking, respectively, among youth in the Cambridge Public Schools.

The police department helped hundreds of people addicted to opioids by reaching out to them on the street and in hospitals, in addition to providing coaching, developing treatment plans, securing placements in treatment centers, and coordinating care for approximately 110 opioid users.

85% of Cambridge middle schoolers say their parents’ opinion is important when deciding whether to try alcohol or other drugs.⁴

Sources:
Violence

Advocates and civic leaders have expressed concern about the pervasiveness of domestic violence in Cambridge and the need for a coordinated, comprehensive response. Current activities are primarily focused on domestic violence and coalition-building. This work includes ensuring access to linguistically and culturally appropriate services for survivors, and making early and consistent prevention education available to youth.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The city’s Domestic Violence and Gender-Based Violence Initiative published an assets and needs report.
- The initiative developed a multi-session domestic violence training for service providers.
- First responders received a refresher training on best practices for responding to high-risk cases, supporting children at the scene of an incident, and identifying elder abuse.
- MENding camBRIDGE, a men’s leadership group, co-organized White Ribbon Day activities and other events to engage men in standing up against gender-based violence.

Healthy, Safe, and Affordable Housing

People who lack safe, affordable housing can experience serious illness and injury due to poor indoor air quality, lead paint, overcrowded conditions, and other hazards. Despite the challenges of creating affordable housing in Cambridge, the city and its partners remain strongly committed to investing in affordable housing, supporting homelessness prevention services, and advocating for tenants’ rights.

HIGHLIGHTS

- City Council voted to allocate 80% ($9.36 million) of fiscal year 2016 Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds for affordable housing.
- Three CPA-funded affordable housing developments were completed: Temple Place (40 units), Bishop Allen Apartments (32 units), and Putnam Square Apartments (94 units).
- City staff helped place over 195 households in affordable inclusionary rental units, and provided homelessness prevention services to 78 households (162 people).
- Just-A-Start assisted over 225 renters, landlords, and condominium owners in mediating disputes, and addressed 90 cases of housing-related issues.

15% of the city’s housing stock is affordable.

Cambridge Demographics

Population: 110,651
Median Age: 30.5 years

Income
Residents living below the poverty line 14%
Families earning $100,000+ per year 52%

Race
Asian 15%
Black or African American 11%
White 68%
Other or multiracial 7%

Ethnicity
Hispanic origin (any race) 8%

National Origin
Foreign-born 27%

Education
(Among residents ages 25+)
No high school diploma 6%
High school diploma 10%
Some college or Associate’s degree 10%
Bachelor’s degree 29%
Advanced degree 46%

Language
Language other than English spoken at home 29%

Sources: Population is a U.S. Census Bureau Estimate from July 1, 2016. All other data from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011-2015.

*Unless otherwise noted, highlighted activities occurred in fiscal year 2016.
Our Work

The Cambridge Public Health Department touches the lives of many residents. Here is a snapshot of health department activities in 2016.

**National Leadership:** Claude Jacob, Chief Public Health Officer, began his year-long term as president of the National Association of County and City Health Officials.

1,979 Patient-visits to the Schipellite Chest Center at Cambridge Hospital for evaluation and treatment of latent and active tuberculosis in 2016. The TB program is operated by the health department.

**Mumps Outbreak:** In response to the mumps outbreak at Harvard University, staff worked with partners to facilitate diagnosis and laboratory testing, develop public health messaging, and conduct contact tracing.

8,871 Children’s books distributed to families by the Agenda for Children Literacy Initiative to support parents in talking and reading with young children.

44,127 Cambridge Public Schools (CPS) student visits to school nurses for illness, injury, medication administration, and medical procedures during the 2015–2016 academic year. School health services are provided by the health department.

#1 Cambridge received a #1 ranking in preventing childhood obesity from Let’s Move! Cities, Towns and Counties.

**West Nile Virus:** The department’s prevention efforts included ensuring that over 7,000 storm drains on city and university property were treated with larvicide; and overseeing the posting of over 70 mosquito advisory signs in designated parks.

1,019 Licenses and permits issued in 2016 related to laboratory biosafety, laboratory animals, indoor ice rinks, tanning salons, body art, bodywork, burials, and funeral directors.

**Mission**

The Cambridge Public Health Department improves the quality of life for all who live, learn, work, and play in the city by preventing illness and injury; encouraging healthy behaviors; and ensuring safe and healthy environments.