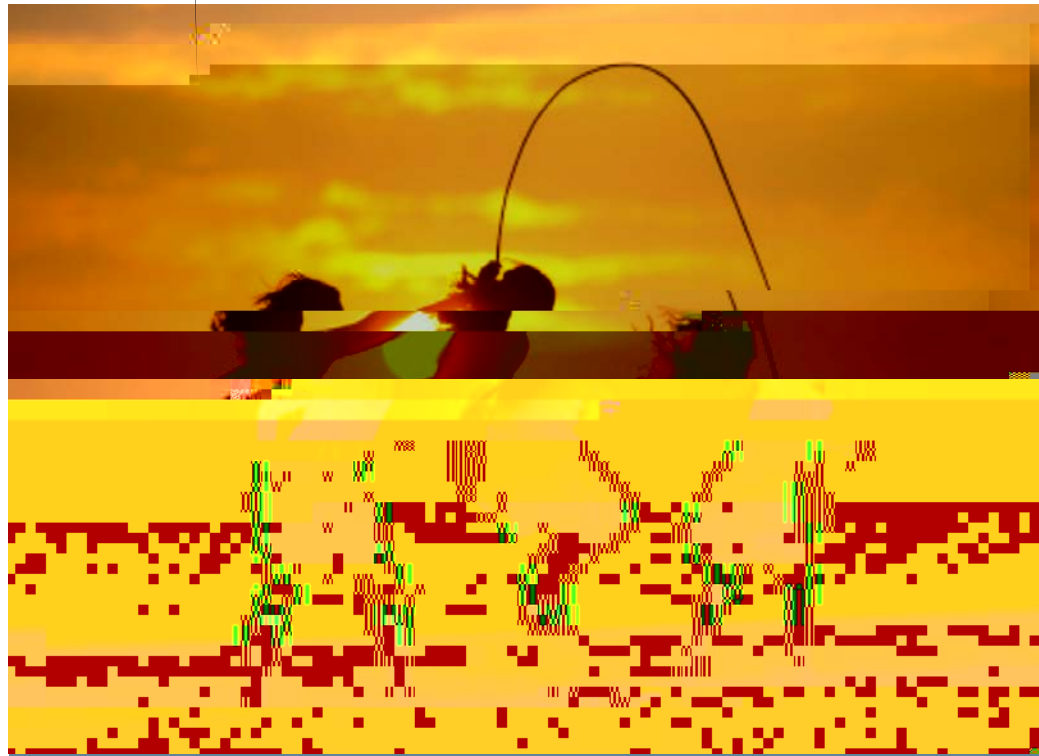


# Health Resources in Ac

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# Abstract

Health Resources in Action (HRiA) systematically reviewed the websites of 153 organizations engaging in healthy communities work and documented if and how they defined a *healthy community*. *Healthy community principles* offered by the organizations as well as the key *elements* that comprise a healthy community were also explored and catalogued. Additionally, seminal literature including peer-reviewed journal articles and gray literature from the Healthy Communities movement and national and international health promotion efforts was examined. One hundred organizations were included in the analysis. Only 11 organizations had formal *healthy community definitions*. Further, only six organizations presented a formal set of *healthy community principles*. Although the majority of organizations did discuss key *elements* necessary to create and maintain a healthy community, few organizations cited specific indicators by which to measure a community's health status. These key elements fell into two categories: *characteristics* of a healthy community and *processes* in which healthy communities engage. It is important to note that the most commonly mentioned *characteristics* were not related to physical health but were social determinants of health. Findings from this

review suggest that the key tenets of the Healthy Communities movement have and continue to influence how *healthy community* work is conceptualized and implemented. Future *healthy community*

# Methodology

This project began with an internet scan to identify publicly available *healthy community* definitions. The first step in the scan was a Google search for organizations engaged in healthy communities work. The search was then expanded to include funders of healthy communities work as well as other organizations involved in community-level health improvement but who do not use the term *healthy community(ies)*. As a way to identify these organizations, search terms were broadened to include phrases such as *sustainable communities, community health, healthy cities, smart growth, community development, healthy community design, vibrant communities and developed communities*. Other organizations were identified through email correspondence with content experts at HRiA and by reading histories of the Healthy Communities movement to identify key collaboratives and institutions. Organizations were included in the search regardless of how they defined the term *community*.

Each entity's website was scanned by reading homepage content, pages titled "About Us" and relevant links. Additionally, the search bar was used to query websites for the following information:

1. a *healthy community definition* or a description of what the organization believes will make people healthier,
2. a list of *characteristics* that should be present in a healthy communities initiative,
3. sets of *specific criteria* and associated *indicators* that identify a healthy community, and
4. a list of *healthy community principles* to guide communities.

If organizations lacked a formal *healthy community* definition, informal definitions, mission and vision statements were examined in order to provide a large sample of organizations.

While the scan was not exhaustive, every effort was made to do a comprehensive search that included definitions from multiple sectors and multiple types of stakeholders (funders, practitioners, technical assistance providers, government and consultants). A total of 153 organizations and programs were examined.

For each organization, source urls, definitions and principles were recorded in a spreadsheet and examined for themes. A separate matrix was created to organize the *elements* that organizations used to define a *healthy community*. Each row of the matrix represented one of the organizations (or, in some cases, an individual program of an organization) and each column represented a single *healthy community element* or criteria. When different terms were used to describe the same element, they were combined into a single column.

Throughout the internet scan, any document (including both peer-reviewed articles and gray literature) that seemed relevant to the scope of this project was archived for review. A total of 17 publications were archived. Documents were reviewed to provide history, context and detail about the Healthy Communities movement and about other health promotion efforts in the United States and globally. If the publication provided a *healthy community definition*, a list of *guiding principles* or a set of *criteria* for a *healthy community*, it was added to the matrix and the spreadsheet.

In total, 100 organizations and programs were entered into the elements matrix. The *healthy community* elements were then color coded to indicate whether they were *characteristics* of a *healthy community*

government; international/global; indices; state and local government; consultants; public health; planning; individuals; specific racial/ethnic subpopulations; policy/law; land use; higher

education; youth-focused; philanthropies and

to work together and on individuals from all walks of life to participate in community change. The charter placed tremendous importance on empowerment of communities, encouraging work to be done in a way that “increases the options available to people to exercise more control over their own health and over their environments, and to make choices conducive to health” (WHO, 117(h)-17(e)-1ieWThe charter6



# Findings

## **HEALTHY COMMUNITY DEFINITIONS**

After reviewing over 150 organizations and programs in search of healthy community definitions, it

Many other organizations share visions for creating healthy communities or describe efforts to create healthy communities without using the actual term healthy community. For example:

“Together, we will create vibrant communities by: building community; leading collaboratively; and, reducing poverty.”

– Tamarak Institute

“Our charge is to reverse the global spread of obesity; to reduce weight bias; and to galvanize community members, public officials, and advocacy groups to achieve positive, lasting change.”

– Rudd Center, Yale University

“We work to enhance the physical, mental, spiritual, and cultural health of American Indians, tribes and communities.”

– The Black Hills Center for American Indian Health

The Kresge Foundation indicates its understanding of what makes communities healthy through its own funding decisions and focus areas:

Our national community development focus is on replicable, innovative models and exemplary financial vehicles for equitable reinvestment... We believe that arts and culture are critical to activities designed to revitalize neighborhoods in the metropolitan areas that most Americans call home...

We promote the health and well-being of low-income and vulnerable populations by improving the environmental and social conditions affecting their communities and by improving access to high-quality health care... Focused on fostering health equity, we put a premium on cross-sector, multi-field projects that address environmental and policy change.

Programs that are primarily aimed at changing individual or group behavior are a low priority.

Despite the wide variety of definitions and the variety of forms in which the ideas were presented, when a large enough number of organizations were considered, patterns of fundamental healthy community elements emerged.

## **ELEMENTS OF A HEALTHY COMMUNITY**

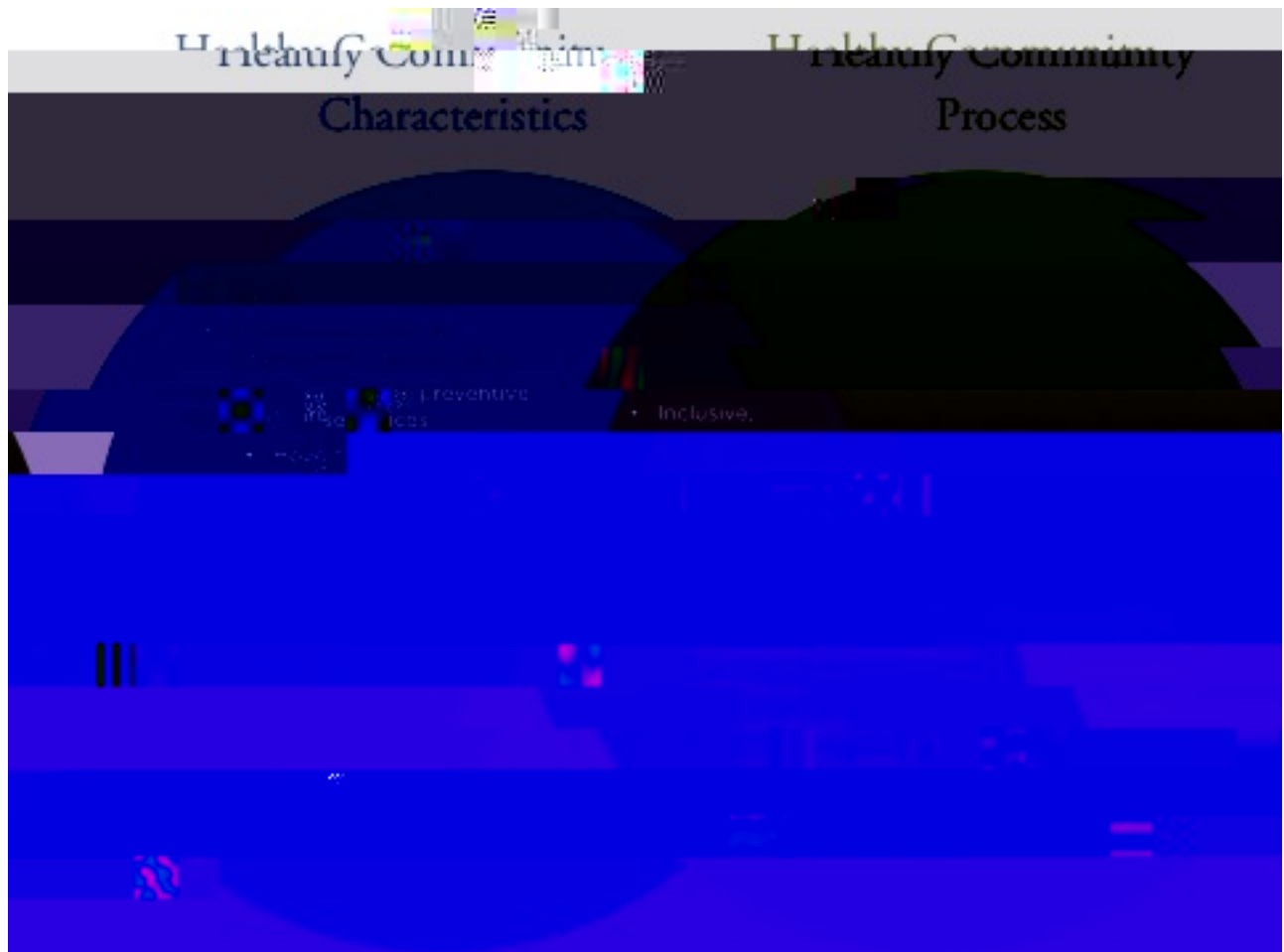
Organizations engaging in healthy community work cite a variety of elements essential to creating healthy communities. In fact, 88 different factors were discussed by the organizations included in this research (see Appendix D for the full list). It was rare that a particular element was mentioned by only one organization.

Healthy community elements that were named by 12 or more organizations are displayed in the list below. They are presented in order, from those mentioned most frequently (“equity” was cited by 34 organizations) to those mentioned least frequently (“use data to guide and measure efforts” was named by 12 organizations).

1. Equity (lack of disparities)
2. A strong economy and employment opportunities (lack of poverty)
3. Education
4. Health care and preventive health services
5. A stable, sustainable ecosystem and environment
6. Inclusive, equitable and broad community participation
7. Employ environmental strategies
8. Engage multi-sector participation
9. The capacity to assess and address their own



! !  
**FIGURE 1. HEALTHY COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS AND PROCESSES**  
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! !  
 It is also important to point out that, other than health care and preventive health services, the healthy community characteristics most often mentioned are not directly related to physical health. They are instead what we now call the social determinants of health, such as employment opportunities or access to health care and preventive health services.

This, coupled with the frequent mention of healthy community processes is not surprising given the Healthy Communities movement's focus on the social determinants of health and process.

**PATTERNS OF HEALTHY COMMUNITY ELEMENTS BY ORGANIZATION TYPE**

After sorting the organizations included in the analysis by sector/focus area, the healthy community elements cited by each organization were analyzed for themes within each organizational category and comparisons were made between categories. When examined in this manner, some interesting patterns emerged.

It is notable that the most frequently named healthy community elements across all organizations align almost exactly with the elements most mentioned by the U.S. Government category. However, the entities within the U.S. Government category rarely cited (cited by only 1 entity) or did not cite at all the

following healthy community elements: *inclusive and equitable and broad community participation, the capacity to assess and address their own health concerns, civic engagement, healthy public policy, empowered population, healthy child development and use data to guide and measure efforts.*

(See figure 2 for lists comparing the most commonly cited healthy community elements by all organizations and by the U.S. Government). It's possible that the close alignment between federal government priorities and the priorities and interest areas of other organizations is in part due to the government's strong role in setting a public agenda for health promotion work through their funding of !

community health initiatives.

It was also noticeable that equity or the lack of disparities was the most frequently cited healthy community element among the *U.S. Government, International* and *Public Health* categories.

Many organizations examined in this research address a particular issue as part of their mission. Not surprisingly, these organizations tend to consider these issues as essential healthy community elements. For example, *land use* organizations often mention green space, land use and the environment. Similarly, youth-focused organizations are overwhelmingly interested in child development.

**FIGURE 2. MOST FREQUENTLY CITED HEALTHY COMMUNITY ELEMENTS — ALL ORGANIZATIONS VS. U.S. GOVERNMENT**

**TOP 20 MOST FREQUENTLY CITED HEALTHY COMMUNITY ELEMENTS — ALL ORGANIZATIONS**

- Equity (lack of disparities)
- A strong economy and employment opportunities (lack of poverty)
- Education
- Health care and preventive health services
- A stable, sustainable ecosystem and environment
- *Inclusive, equitable and broad community participation*
- Employ environmental strategies
- Engage multi-sector participation
- *The capacity to assess and address their own health concerns*
- Collaboration between partners
- Housing / Shelter
- *Civic engagement*
- *Healthy public policy*
- Access to healthy food
- Safety
- Opportunities for active living
- Transportation

- Empowered population
- Healthy child development
- Use data to guide and measure efforts

**TOP 20 MOST FREQUENTLY CITED HEALTHY COMMUNITY ELEMENTS — U.S. GOVERNMENT**

- Equity (lack of disparities)
- A strong economy and employment opportunities (lack of poverty)
- Education
- Health care and preventive health services
- A stable, sustainable ecosystem and environment
- Employ environmental strategies
- Engage multi-sector participation
- Collaboration between partners
- Housing / Shelter
- Access to healthy food
- Safety
- Opportunities for active living
- Transportation

## HEALTHY COMMUNITY PRINCIPLES

Of all the organizations reviewed as a part of this scan, only six of them cited a formal set of healthy community principles to guide communities in their work. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health's Office of Healthy Communities uses the collection of healthy community principles developed by Community Initiatives, LLC with a few minor changes.

### Organizations Citing Healthy Community Principles

- Community Initiatives, LLC
- Massachusetts Office of Healthy Communities
- Tom Wolff and Associates
- Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition
- Zagreb Declaration for Healthy Cities, WHO Europe
- Community Tool Box, Work Group for Community Health and Development, University of Kansas

Although the sets of healthy community principles varied from one another, they had many principles in common. Below is a list of the principles that were shared by two or more of the sets that were examined:

### Common Healthy Community Principles

- A broad definition of community that is multi-sectoral
- A broad definition of health
- A shared vision
- Community ownership
- Asset-based
- Equity
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Sustainability

The importance of having a broad definition of community that stresses diverse partnerships across sectors was consistent in almost all of the sets of principles. The idea that health should also be defined broadly to include a range of quality of life issues and determinants of health was also a commonality. Three of the organizations included a principle that stresses the importance of having a shared vision rooted in community values that guides healthy community work. All of the six sets of healthy community principles included a principle about community ownership underscoring the necessity of community engagement and self-determination in order to ensure the success of community health improvement efforts. Additionally, the concept that healthy community initiatives should build capacity and use local assets and resources was shared. Several of the organizations listed equity as a principle. Equity was described as addressing inequalities in health as well as assuring that there is equitable community engagement in community improvement processes. The importance of monitoring progress and evaluating outcomes was a common theme. Two organizations included principles related to sustainability emphasizing that community work should ensure economic development and build supportive infrastructure. Community Initiatives, LLC was the only organization to include focus on systems change as a guiding principle.

# Discussion

## Healthy Community Definitions

The findings of this research are not surprising as they clearly reflect the key tenets of the Healthy

and available for public comment, it will be important for this principle to be included in future guiding principles. Despite monitoring and evaluation being a common principle found, it may also be important to

be explicit about the importance of using evidence-based strategies and innovation when engaging in healthy community work in order to maximize resources and impact.

## Learnings

Based on the key learnings of this research, we propose a healthy communities framework where:

- Each community defines its own notion of a healthy community;
- Healthy community process is as important as health outcomes; and
- Healthy community process is guided by healthy community principles.

Although it may be implicit, it is worth highlighting the critical role that individuals play in each of the key learnings noted above and in the overall Healthy Communities framework itself. Broad and multi-sectoral participation where diverse opinions are offered is essential in ensuring community engagement and in ultimately ensuring the success of healthy communities planning efforts.

### **Each community defines its own notion of a healthy community**

In 1986, the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion defined health promotion as "the process of enabling

people to increase control over, and to improve their health." In order for healthy community improvements to be effective and sustainable, it remains vital today that communities, themselves decide how they define health. Please see Appendix F for a working healthy community definition.

### **Healthy community process is as important as health outcomes**

Historically, healthy communities work has focused primarily on empowering communities to engage in processes to improve health with little attention given to measuring benchmarks and outcomes. Conversely, the public health community in recent years has directed funding to initiatives that focus on demonstrating impact on specific health issues as

6outcomes

## FIGURE 3. HEALTHY COMMUNITIES FRAMEWORK

### Healthy community process should be guided by healthy community principles

Healthy community principles provide a non-prescriptive roadmap that lays out how healthy community work will be accomplished. We recommend a set of healthy community principles comprised of the most commonly cited principles and include *systems change, community engagement and accountability* and *use of evidence-based interventions while encouraging innovative practices with thorough evaluation*!!

### Healthy Community Principles



Healthy Community Principles

# Appendix A

## HISTORY OF THE HEALTHY COMMUNITIES MOVEMENT

1978

UNICEF/WHO conference and Declaration of Alma Ata provided a broader definition of health and related health to economic and social development

1986

The First International Conference on Health Promotion resulted in the Ottawa Charter for





# Appendix B

## ORGANIZATIONS REVIEWED

Action for Healthy Kids

Active Living By Design, RWJF

Alliance for a Healthier Generation

American Hospital Association

American Planning Association:

Great Plans, Great Communities

American Public Health Association

Americans for Nonsmokers Rights Foundation

APPEAL (Asian Pacific Partners for

Empowerment, Advocacy and Leadership)

New Orleans Health Commission  
Office of Healthy Homes/OHHLHC-HUD  
Office of Rural Health Policy/HRSA  
Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition  
Opportunity Index  
Parkscore  
Pew Research Center  
PHI Illinois  
PHI — ACCESS  
PHI — BARHI  
PHI — CA4Health  
PHI — CAHC  
PHI — Cal Convergence  
PHI — CAN Act  
PHI — CCP  
PHI — CCROPP  
PHI — Center for Civic Partnerships, California  
    Healthy Cities and Communities  
PHI — HiAP  
PHI — Network  
PHI — OHSEP  
PHI — Pacific ADA  
PHI — Project LEAN  
PHI — Public Health Institute Center on Disability  
PHI — PHT  
PHI — RAMP  
Playworks  
PolicyLink  
Prevention Institute  
Public Health Foundation  
Public Health Law Center  
Public Health Law Research, RWJF  
Redefining Progress: Genuine Progress Indicator  
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation  
Rudd Center/Yale  
San Francisco Department of Public Health  
Search Institute  
SmartGrowth  
Society for Public Health Education  
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Stanford University Prevention Research Center  
Sustainable Communities Network  
The Change Project  
The Food Trust  
The Public Health Institute  
The Tamarack Institute and Vibrant Communities  
The Trust for Public Land  
Tisch College of Citizenship & Public Service,  
    Tufts University  
Trust for America's Health  
United Health Foundation  
United Nations Development Programme —  
    Human Development Index  
United Way Worldwide  
University of North Carolina Center for  
    Health Promotion and Disease Prevention  
University of Wisconsin Public Health Institute  
Urban Land Institute  
US Department of Education  
US Department of Health and Human Services  
US Department of Transportation  
US Environmental Protection Agency  
US Health Resources and Services Administration  
US Housing and Urban Development  
Victoria, Australia Department of Health  
What Works for America's Communities  
WHO Europe  
WHO Europe Healthy Cities project  
WHO Ottawa Charter  
WHO Targets for Health for All  
WHO — World Health Organization  
WK Kellogg Foundation  
World Bank Community Driven Development  
YMCA — Young Men's Christian Association,  
    Healthy Communities Initiative (general)  
YMCA, ACHIEVE  
YMCA, PHC  
YMCA, STEPS

# Appendix C

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## **ORGANIZATIONS INCLUDED IN ANALYSIS**

Action for Healthy Kids

Active Living By Design, RWJF

Alliance for a Healthier Generation

American Planning Association:

Great Plans, Great Communities

American Public Health Association

Americans for Nonsmokers Rights Foundation

APPEAL (Asian Pacific Partners for

Empowerment, Advocacy and Leadership)

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# Appendix D

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## COMPLETE LIST OF HEALTHY COMMUNITY ELEMENTS

- access to fresh fruits and vegetables/ healthy

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# Appendix E

# Appendix F

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## **WORKING HEALTHY COMMUNITY DEFINITION**

A healthy community is one in which a diverse group of stakeholders collaborate to use their expertise and local knowledge to create a community that is socially and physically conducive to health. Community members are empowered and civically engaged, assuring that all local policies consider health. The community has the capacity to identify, address, and evaluate their own health concerns on an ongoing basis, using data to guide and benchmark efforts.

As a result, a healthy community is safe, economically secure, and environmentally sound, as all residents have equal access to high quality educational and employment opportunities, transportation and housing options, prevention and healthcare services, and healthy food and physical activity opportunities.

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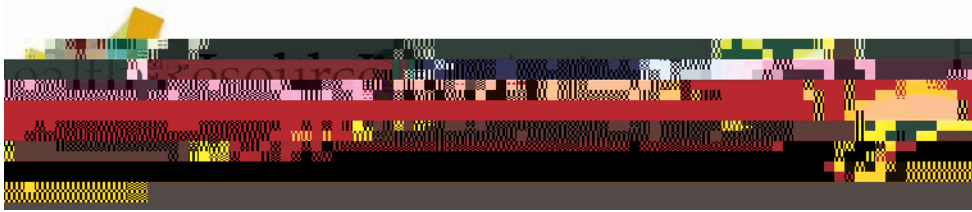
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located in Boston, whose mission is to help peo  
through policy, re



Created in 2001 as a forum for public health in  
partners at the local, state, and national levels  
mission is to support national public health  
to promote multi-sector activities resulting i  
systems, and outcomes. Learn more about NNPHI an