

Incorporating a Health Impact Assessment into the Indy Parks Comprehensive Plan

Description:

An Indy Parks manager requested a health impact assessment be conducted to assist in their Comprehensive Plan due for completion in 2013. The Comprehensive Plan is conducted every five years to categorize current parks and greenways, as well as to establish future needs of each township being served by Indy Parks and Recreation. A health impact assessment was to be used by parks and recreation staff and for community members to understand the role of parks, recreation activities and green space on individual health and community health.

Scoping for this health impact assessment established the priority outcome was to determine park opinions attitudes, perceptions and usage behaviors within non-park users in each township. The reasoning for choosing the non-park user population was primarily due to the lack of inclusion from this population in previous comprehensive plans. It was determined a rapid health impact assessment would be conducted with review of the literature, key informant interviews and surveys of residents in each township. IRB approval was received for the project.

Possible health impacts included decreasing the incidence of diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, stress, increasing social cohesion, increased vegetation and decreased run-off. Health determinants included physical activity, mental health, social health and environmental health.

The assessment determined that non-park users did not have a reason to use the park, such as their children were grown, next they were unaware of park location or activities, they believed them to be unsafe, lack of time, and they use other facilities to exercise. Suggestions to increase the use of parks by non-park users included improve maintenance and cleanliness, increase safety, increase walking and biking trails, and increasing the number of shelters. The non-park users also wanted more advertising about park programs, and more updated playground equipment. Favorite recreational activities by non-park users included walking, swimming, and biking. Key township stakeholders also suggested increasing partnerships in the community using the parks for farmer's markets, community gardens, health fairs, and adding exercise stations along the walking paths.