

Our Health and Wellbeing

Where We Are: The ability to lead healthy lives takes many forms: having access to affordable fresh food; having a quality park in walking or biking distance; being able to receive healthcare, including both medical and mental health support; and feeling supported after experiencing a hazard or a life-changing emergency, among many others. Health and wellbeing are dependent on many different factors working together, and most of these are outside the control of individual residents.

Today, who you are and where you live in Gainesville impacts your ability to lead a healthy and fulfilling life. Health disparities, defined as a particular type of health difference that is closely linked with social, economic, and/or environmental disadvantage are very common in Gainesville. Differences in health outcomes are stark – a 2020 study in Alachua County found that life expectancy was lower for Black residents compared to White residents. Black residents are also more likely than White residents to experience chronic diseases that requiring continued care such as diabetes, and that the infant death rate was almost four times higher among Black residents compared to White and Hispanic residents¹. Furthermore, access to healthcare is dependent on where you live. While Alachua County has almost three times the number of physicians and double the number of hospital beds per 100,000 people compared to the state of Florida, they are not distributed equitably, yet western areas of the County have more than four times the number of health clinics and urgent care centers than eastern areas.²

The inequitable distribution of healthcare facilities is only one contributor to the disparate health outcomes that Gainesville sees today. Neighbors living in areas with low transit access, including Black neighbors living in areas like East Gainesville due to decades of racially motivated policies such as redlining and racial covenants, will have a more difficult time accessing care, especially if they do not own a car. Low-income residents may not be able to afford health insurance, take time off work to go to a healthcare clinic, afford life-saving equipment including smoke alarms, buy fresh and healthy food option, have a park nearby that they can exercise in, or know where to go for support if they need medications or other forms of care. Gainesville neighbors also face barriers with respect to language, cognitive, sensory and physical disabilities, gender identity and sexual orientation which often compound with other minority identities.

Progress to Build On: The City of Gainesville currently manages multiple initiatives to support neighbors leading healthy lives:

- The Community Resource Paramedic Program identifies neighbors who frequently rely on emergency services and provides ongoing support to rebuild their health through connecting them to primary care, providing mobile integrated health, medical support and education, as well as collaborating with community-based organizations to provide food and clothing.
- Gainesville Fire Rescue (GFR) implements programs to provide child safety seats at a reduced cost, along with training and support to ensure the seats are installed properly, and to supply and install smoke alarms for households who could not otherwise afford this equipment. Yet many of these efforts are underfunded and require additional resources to continue supporting the community.
- The City has planted Edible Groves – small orchards of fruit and nut trees in public parks – in order to bring healthy food into some of our most vulnerable communities. Neighbors are encouraged to stroll through the groves and to pick food from the trees to eat. These initiatives help bring health and wellness to our neighbors, yet many are underfunded and require additional resources to continue supporting the community

¹ Alachua County Community Health Assessment 2020, retrieved from <https://www.wellflorida.org/reports/>

² Guyer. *Health Outcomes, Longevity, and ZIP Code*. 2021.

- Collaborations between the City and community health clinics have produced funds for Helping Hands Clinic and the ACORN Clinic through successful HUD Community Block Grant applications.
- The City of Gainesville's park system currently manages more than 3,200 acres of space providing access to cultural, recreational, and natural areas that offer a variety of leisure experiences. Parks, Recreation and Cultural affairs has consistently implemented scholarship and reduced rates to ensure many are free or considerably affordable. All youth, senior, and special populations programs and resources are exempt from additional surcharges and have reduced fees to support these efforts. Additionally, efforts have been made to ensure that low-income families have free access to the City's after school care programs through subsidizing the programs.
- **The City's water purveyor provides high quality treated drinking water that contributes to both physical and dental health.**

What's at Stake: Ensuring equitable health opportunities for all, regardless of one's identity, should be the cornerstone of the Gainesville community; factors beyond a person's control should no longer predict whether they can lead healthy lives. Furthermore, timely action is very critical for health and wellbeing, since maintaining a person's health requires both preventative and ongoing care. The City should invest resources and effort in time to actually create more equitable outcomes rather than waiting until a person has no other choice but to seek emergency care.

Through the ImagineGNV plan, the City will focus on creating equitable access and experiences with respect to healthcare, food, exercise, fitness, and recreation, all with a more conscious and deliberate focus to improve the lives of those most in need, including neighbors of color, low-income neighbors, and neighbors experiencing homelessness.

Outcome 1: All Gainesville residents, including people experiencing homelessness, will have affordable and equitable access to medical and dental care, as well as mental health support.

Gainesville should be a place where neighbors, regardless of who they are, can access care that meets their specific needs. The City will achieve this through a combination of efforts that include both raising awareness and partnering with service providers to make sure that healthcare and mental health support is reaching neighbors who are most in need.

Indicators

- Health outcomes by race/ethnicity and by neighborhood (e.g. short term: emergency department visits, long term: youth mortality rate, rates of chronic diseases, etc.) - -
- Percent of neighbors with health insurance by race/ethnicity and by neighborhood
- Air quality by neighborhood
- Percent of residents who can access a health clinic or primary care provider within 30 minutes transportation time, by race/ethnicity and by neighborhood
- Percent of neighbors enrolled in a health insurance program

Strategies

- 1. Increase medical care provision in areas underserved by healthcare clinics.**
- 2. Expand affordable access to healthcare for low-income neighbors by XX.**
 - a. Establish a program to help enroll/increase access to health insurance.

- b. The City will help connect people to information needed to overcome barriers, as well as enhance access and enrollment to health insurance, using innovative communication platforms and channels.
 - c. City will promote information about Dental Care access to individuals who may be without.
- 3. Launch a messaging campaign that informs neighbors about where they can receive mental health support and that reduces stigma toward people experiencing mental health challenges.**
The City will partner with trusted community organizations and direct service providers, including mental healthcare clinics, to strengthen messaging
- 4. Launch a messaging campaign that informs neighbors about the importance and opportunities to access dental health services.**
- 5. Improve neighbors' healthcare access through tailored programs for different groups, including neighbors experiencing homelessness.** The City will develop specific strategies to promote fair and equitable access to healthcare. This will entail:
 - a. Reviewing existing data, collected via the Community Resource Paramedic Program, among others, to identify potential issues that neighbors face when accessing healthcare.
 - b. Utilize Community Health Workers to improve healthcare access, by conducting effective community outreach.
 - c. Designing programs building on the findings and refining program design through community input, where necessary. Tailored programs may include:
 - i. Raising awareness of the healthcare options available to neighbors. (e.g. conducting outreach via schools to reach households with children)
 - ii. Collaborating with UF and stakeholders in the City's healthcare industry to improve healthcare access.
- 6. Support mental health programs for neighbors who have been impacted by the criminal justice system** (including mental health court) in order to break the cycle of recidivism.
- 7. Support community outreach teams via GRACE** to augment permanent supportive housing efforts with mental health supports and alternatives to calling law enforcement
 - a. Provide mental health supports via GFR community paramedic program for outreach workers
- 8. City will continue to support, promote and celebrate volunteerism around public health / community wellness programs** by developing partnerships with local educational institutions, as well as private healthcare and wellness professionals

Outcome 2: All residents will have access to affordable, healthy, and culturally appropriate food.

As the City of Gainesville strives to address social determinants of health that impact neighbors' quality of life, improving access to healthy food that is affordable and culturally appropriate is a high priority of the City. Through collaborative initiatives with partners throughout the area, the City is developing innovative programs, projects and policies that address the complexity and inequities within our food systems and create comprehensive solutions that support neighbors to access healthy, affordable, and sustainably-sourced food that throughout Gainesville.

Indicators

- Percent of Neighbors that can access a grocery store within ½ mile and 1 mile of their home.
- Number of corner stores participating in a program to improve healthy food access within their store. and other healthy food retailers (farmers markets, corner stores that offer healthy food) by Zip Code
- Number of neighbors receiving donated food / groceries through partnership-based projects that the City of Gainesville is engaging in and/or supporting via funding, volunteer recruitment, networking to promote inter-organizational collaborations, etc.
- Number of edible groves established throughout the city, and the number of trees planted in total
- Number of neighbors enrolled and utilizing SNAP and WIC

Strategies:

1. Promote the production of healthy food via partnerships, programs, and regulatory tools.

Strategies include:

- a. Promote food security and public health by encouraging locally based food production, distribution, and choice in accordance with the Land Development Code.
- b. Encourage edible landscaping (i.e., fruit trees and shrubs) for landscaping requirements through appropriate policy and standards of the Land Development Code.
- c. Consider programs to encourage property owners to make use of vacant properties as community gardens and planting home gardens and other food producing plants on their property.
- d. Continue to offer support for urban agriculture operations by maintaining the Urban Agriculture Ordinance adopted into the City of Gainesville's Land Development Code (pending ordinance approval)
- e. Continue to offer support for community gardens through the City's Community Garden Program and leverage support from programs offered by other local agencies that target low-income and populations at high-risk for health disparity for programs promoting gardening, healthy food access and nutrition improvement.

2. Increase neighbors' access to health-promoting, culturally relevant, and affordable food.

Strategies include:

- a. Discourage the sale of less healthy foods and beverages as defined by Institute of Medicine within local government facilities including recreational areas and recreational programming, especially those targeting youth.
- b. Support food banks, pantries, and other sources that help provide food assistance to low income residents so that all families, seniors, schools, and community-based organizations are able to access, purchase, and increase intake of seasonal and fresh fruits, vegetables, and other nutritious foods. This support shall include supporting food recovery initiatives that reduce wasted food and increase donations of excess food donations to appropriate agencies able to receive such donations. Additionally, promote the use of schools as food distribution sites to increase food security for students and families through backpack programs and school-based food pantries.
- c. Encourage public and private efforts that support culturally appropriate food opportunities, including grocery stores, farmers markets, food banks and nutrition programs, especially to meet the nutritional needs of infants, children, elders, and other vulnerable populations in their neighborhoods.
- d. Utilize economic development tools including public/private partnerships, incentive programs, and site facilitation, to promote location of grocery stores and Farmers Markets in proximity to underserved areas

- e. Coordinate with Regional Transit System [RTS] and other public transit providers to facilitate access to food shopping for transportation-disadvantaged residents through incentives.
- f. Encourage farmers' markets and other healthy food retailers to accept federal nutrition programs such as WIC and SNAP (food stamps) and encourage information distribution via City offices and website. Continue to work with local organizations to offer incentives for utilizing the nutrition programs, such as the statewide double-dollar SNAP matching program known as Fresh Access Bucks.
- g. Develop a program for partnerships for healthy corner stores, and incentives to attract grocers to food deserts.

3. Promote healthy food consumption through education and partnerships. Strategies include:

- a. Form partnerships with organizations or worksites, such as employers, health care facilities and schools, to encourage healthy foods and beverages.
- b. Support programs that incentivize and/or assist neighbors with gaining access to healthy foods, such as Produce Prescription Programs and Fresh Access Bucks.
- c. Connect with UF/IFAS Extension Office for support in offering educational programs and materials focused on nutrition, horticulture, seasonality of produce and best practices for living a healthy lifestyle.
- d. Promote a healthy community by enhancement of school-based health promotion and activities, including for persons with special needs.
- e. Provide technical assistance for community food access studies that follow a community-driven participatory action research methodology.

Outcome 3: All residents will have access to quality park space, facilities, recreation programs, and environmentally significant open space.

Gainesvillians appreciate and place a strong value on accessible and well-maintained open space, park systems, and environmentally significant natural areas. These places serve as invaluable assets to our City's quality of life and positively impact the health and wellbeing of both Gainesville residents and visitors from surrounding communities. They provide opportunities for active and passive recreation, support our local ecosystem and aquifers, and help reduce pollution.

As the City expands, natural areas need to be preserved, maintained, and continue to serve as resources to all Gainesvillians to enjoy nature close to home. Currently, neighbors with higher incomes and more resources are better able to access natural areas. To reduce this disparity, the City will continue to make natural areas accessible to all residents regardless of who they are and where they live.

Additionally, engagement processes that are inclusive of the visitors of the city's parks and amenities and accurately source their needs is critical to ensuring that neighbors of all identities have a sense of belonging at the city's parks. To do so, PRCA will develop systems for creating a robust feedback process for new projects.

Indicators

- Park access & quality
 - Visitors' satisfaction levels, sense of safety, perception toward park quality/upkeep, etc. at parks (via the annual neighborhood survey)
 - % of residents who can access parks within 10 minutes
 - Number of residents who visit parks, disaggregated by race and ethnicity (via the annual neighborhood survey)
 - Park acreage per 1000 residents

- Environmentally significant open space
 - % of residents who have access to major trail systems within a specified distance/travel time
 - % of trails meeting ADA standards
- Community input
 - Attendance at public open houses that inform the design of new amenities
 - % of visitors who feel that their voices have been heard (e.g. via the annual neighborhood survey)

Strategies

1. **Consider the quantity, quality, and accessibility of existing parks in a neighborhood when prioritizing funding for the construction and maintenance of parks and amenities.** PRCA will continue to fund new parks with the goal to ensure all Gainesvillians have a park within a 10-minute walk from their homes. In doing so, PRCA will:
 - a. Account for both the accessibility of parks and the quality of these parks and amenities in a neighborhood when identifying new areas for park development. This will ensure that historically Black neighborhoods such as East Gainesville are prioritized to receive new and well-maintained facilities.
 - b. Take into account both City-owned and non-City parks. As the City expands westward, West Gainesville has seen many newer private or non-profit recreational amenities developed to serve new residents. PRCA will use the community services inventory to identify private or non-profit amenities to account for different types of spaces. By taking these non-City investments into consideration, the PRCA will direct City resources to ensure that high-quality parks are equitably located and accessible to all.

As an immediate next step, PRCA will reflect this in the upcoming planning process to create a needs assessment for the 20-year master plan.

2. **Purchase additional lands or use City-owned property for new park development.** As the footprint and populations of Gainesville grows, additional land and parks will need to be added to ensure we maintain a quality percentage of park acreage per population levels. To do so:
 - a. PRCA will use currently owned properties or purchase undeveloped lands for new park development. Utilizing currently owned lands can make best use of unused lands without a need to displace residents or other uses important to neighborhoods.
 - b. PRCA will plan land purchases based on land acquisition priorities that consider a site's ecological significance, connectivity to other conservation areas, potential to create recreational opportunities to neighbors, and archaeological and cultural value.
3. **Offer varied and affordable park programs for residents of all identities, and increase awareness of available programs and amenities.** PRCA will offer programs that are tailored to each community and create a sense of belonging at each of the city's parks. In doing so, the PRCA will partner with local educational institutions such as the University of Florida, Santa Fe College, and the School Board of Alachua County, as well as other private and non-profit organizations across the city. Through these partnerships, the PRCA will ensure accessibility to these programs through minimizing participation fees and tailoring programs and amenities to the needs of surrounding neighborhoods.
4. **Incentivize private developers to contribute to park development.** PRCA, in partnership with the Department of Sustainable Development, will create policies and incentives for private developers to increase park development. Incentives, partnerships, or sponsorships act as an opportunity for the City and private developers to work together in developments that mutually benefit each other while providing increased availability and quality of parks, open spaces, and facilities.

5. **Establish open space and trail systems throughout the City, with a focus on locations where they are less accessible.** Open space and trail systems provide ways for neighbors to walk, jog, bike, and enjoy nature away from vehicular traffic across the City. In establishing open space and trail systems, the PRCA will:
 - a. Prioritize establishing natural areas in more urban areas and areas near historically lower-income areas of Gainesville and where residents have less transit access.
 - b. Ensure that natural areas conform to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 when feasible given the environment.
 - c. Use abandoned railroad rights-of-way, utility rights-of-way, and creek beds to link residential, commercial, and industrial locations similar to the City's road network.
 - d. Continue to ensure new developments and amenities will provide the best and most appropriate use based on land acquisition policies prior to development.
6. **Work with the Urban Forestry Management Plan + CRA to plant shade trees and street trees in neighborhoods that lack tree coverage.** The PRCA, in partnership with the Urban Forestry Management Plan and the CRA, will create more shade trees within parks, near trails and streets, and in neighborhoods that lack tree coverage. This will reduce pollution, increase vibrancy of neighborhoods, and support reduction of extreme environmental impacts such as heat, excessive water runoff, and improved air quality.
7. **Conduct inclusive engagement that invites neighbors to participate in decision-making over parks.** Priority actions include:
 - a. **Launch "Community Program Proposal Day," a process to solicit neighbors' ideas for recreational programming.** This will ensure that neighbors and community organizations have the opportunity to voice their ideas for recreational programs and receive support with implementation in the form of funding, administrative support, and partnerships. PRCA will develop an evaluation rubric to ensure that successful proposals address existing racial equity concerns in the community and represent community needs.
 - b. **Conduct outreach to residents when creating needs assessments, determining program priorities, designing new parks and amenities.** The success of programming and design depends on meeting the needs of residents and ensuring that users inform the design. PRCA will always conduct community engagement when determining citywide priorities or designing individual amenities, to ensure that PRCA's decisions reflect resident feedback. For new developments, PRCA will conduct outreach from the conceptual stages through the design process of new park developments, ensure they are collaborative, and provide for multiple forms of participation to ensure that they are accessible to all. In parallel, PRCA will conduct ongoing engagement and communications of recreational programming information through publications, workshops, and media exposure.
8. **Update parks standards to consider user-centric indicators (e.g. satisfaction levels, parks access) to ensure that parks meet residents' needs.** Park standards should be developed with user needs in mind. The PRCA will conduct surveys and assessments for programs and in parks to create data that helps direct implementation of programming, directs use of resources in parks, and helps guide best practices in maintaining park spaces. The PRCA will conduct a large-scale needs assessments periodically to ensure that the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs Master Plan stays current and reflects the needs of Gainesville's residents when determining development priorities. Feedback from these sources can help determine priorities and direction when requesting new or required resources.

Outcome 4: All residents will be protected from hazards.

Due to existing disparities in knowledge and resources, low-income neighbors and neighbors of color face greater risk from hazards at home and occupationally. Gainesville Fire & Rescue will ensure that all neighbors, regardless of their identities, are able to live safely and free of hazards.

Indicators

- Hazards by incidents by neighborhood
- Percent of 911 call responses by Police Officers, Firefighters, EMS or mental health professionals.
- Percent of households protected by a working smoke alarm during an emergency response or courtesy inspection by neighborhood (to be tracked in coordination with DSD)
- Percent of staff trained in mental health first aid.

Strategies

1. **Continue to support neighbors who have been involved in fires and accidents.** Many neighbors who need emergency response services from the City of Gainesville are facing some of the worst and most life changing events they have faced; providing timely support for neighbors following a life changing emergency can be an important factor in their ability to maintain family stability. City of Gainesville will invest in a program to offer more support for neighbors recovering from an emergency. Assistance could include:
 - a. For neighbors: resources needed to navigate insurance providers, obtain food, shelter, social and mental health support for those affected.
 - b. For community builders: a mental health system that will help insulate responders from post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as family and substance abuse counseling.
2. **Create an emergency response system that dispatches different experts based on the need (e.g. mental health experts) and triages without slowing down the response time.** The City will develop a system that quickly triages 911 calls and dispatches appropriate resources, including those other than Police Officers, ambulances or Firefighters, such as mental health professionals, social workers and other medical health professionals, when appropriate. This program will:
 - a. Provide timely assistance to neighbors before the problem or issues becomes an emergency. Gainesville Fire Rescue routinely responds to medical patients whose medical condition has worsened because they were unable to obtain adequate care or proper medications. As a result, their disease process progresses to a life altering or life threatening emergency. By intervening early and connecting neighbors to preventative resources, fewer neighbors will have the need to seek emergency response.
 - b. Ensure that neighbors suffering from untreated mental health challenges and addiction who call 911 are able to access a humane response to their conditions.
3. **Provide free smoke alarms to all residents.** Neighbors who are at increased risk from injury or death from fires are disproportionately represented by people of color and low-income households. The City of Gainesville will dedicate adequate funding to GFR's free smoke alarm program to ensure all neighbors are equitably protected from fires. Currently, Gainesville Fire Rescue installs around 40 smoke alarms per year for neighbors who cannot afford to purchase or replace smoke alarms. However, given that the program relies on donations and a partnership with the American Red Cross to supply neighbors with smoke alarms, when donations are limited, neighbors must wait several months to receive this life saving device. Dedicated funding sources will ensure neighbors in need are provided this life saving equipment.

4. **Provide assistance to residents in need of reducing risk of falls, especially for the elderly.** The City will develop a fall prevention and safety program for seniors and other high risk neighbors. The City will enhance safety by addressing mobility and access issues within the home, such as providing wheelchair access ramps, wheelchair accessible surfaces from the right of way to the home, wider doorways, accessible appliances and plumbing fixtures.
5. **Address community firearm safety.** The City will continue to work with community partners to conduct firearm buyback events and will develop additional targeted firearm safety initiatives directed toward firearm safety messages and limiting access to firearms for illegal purposes.