

Social and Built Environment

Our social and built environment have far-reaching impacts on our health, including our risk of breast cancer. The social and built environment is considered a foundational risk factor because it overlaps with so many other factors.

Science Summary

The built environment includes physical aspects of communities such as walkability, access to green space and recreation facilities, tree density, safe air/water/food, and public transportation. It influences our ability to exercise, our access to fresh healthy foods, our exposure to air and water pollution, and our exposure to light at night - all factors linked to breast cancer risk.

What can I do for my own body and health?

Green space provides opportunities for physical activity and the benefits of higher tree density include lower stress, social connectivity (knowing your neighbors), less anxiety and depression, lower air pollution, and improved cognition. Better public transportation and more bike lanes reduce pollution from car exhaust, which is linked to breast cancer risk.

The social environment includes relationships, interpersonal connections, peer group interactions, social norms, and other behavioral influences. Lack of social interaction can increase stress and isolation, which may increase tobacco and alcohol use, both risk factors for breast cancer.

Creating safer environments increases social interactions, and decreases social isolation. Overall, social connectivity is one of the strongest social determinants of health. Together, we can ensure everyone has access to healthy built and social environments.

How can I navigate and get support with any systemic barriers to my health?

Our collective action can support health equity, and shift community priorities to improve health. Creating that collective action starts with each of us being committed to creating change.

We can all take steps to know our neighbors better. Make a point of meeting people on the street, organize a block party, or attend community meetings. Many of the decisions about our built environment are made through zoning laws and local city councils. Get to know members of your city/county council, zoning board, and school board. Work with local leadership to propose ways to improve your community.

How can I help advocate for and support systemic change to remove barriers to health?

One of the most important aspects of addressing problems in our social and built environments is ensuring local community members, particularly in marginalized communities, have meaningful leadership, representation, and decision-making power in the process. Without this, there is a high risk of improving areas in ways that lead to gentrification and displacing long-term residents, thus tearing apart the social fabric of established neighborhoods.

Here are some ways to get involved with systems-level action to reduce breast cancer risk:



Create healthier communities by planting more trees, installing benches, and funding public art projects in existing and new public spaces, with community input and leadership.



Work with city leadership to move commercial trucking routes away from residential areas.



With community input and leadership, encourage bike use by expanding the network of bike lanes and access for bikes on public transportation.



Expand affordability and access to bike share networks in communities of color and low-income areas, while ensuring bikes do not hinder access to sidewalks.



Provide incentives for schools to offer community programming (for example, physical activity and food swaps) after hours and on weekends.



Work with city and county leadership to increase usable sidewalks, safe intersections, adequate lighting, and well-connected walking routes.



Learn more and get involved.

**TOGETHER, WE CAN
MAKE CHANGE!**

Breast Cancer Prevention Partners (BCPP) is the leading science-based advocacy organization working to prevent breast cancer by eliminating our exposure to toxic chemicals and other environmental exposures linked to the disease.



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