

## Supporting a Healthier, More Equitable San Mateo County Together



Hello, Get Healthy Friends and Family - It's great to have this venue to talk with you directly! I manage the Health Policy and Planning Program and the Get Healthy initiative for the San Mateo County Health System. It's been a pleasure to meet so many of you in our network who are dedicated to improving the lives of San Mateo County residents and workers. Working with you gives me confidence that our collective impact will help us achieve our shared goals around healthy, equitable communities –a vision that I feel strongly about.

Working together, there is nothing we can't achieve. We are challenged by decades of building our communities around cars instead of people. We've prioritized moving cars faster and farther and building residential communities far away from where people work or access most services and amenities. Our schools have been squeezed to limit or eliminate a focus on creating a healthy environment for students to thrive and get educated, for a focus on exam outcomes.

This has all come with a price –increased pollution levels, congestion, transportation costs, higher drop-out rates and of course, poor health outcomes. Our environments no longer build in daily physical activity and often facilitate poor eating habits. San Mateo County's diabetes rates have increased 250% over the last 10 years - unprecedented for any disease! Once called adult onset diabetes, Type II diabetes is no longer called that because of how prevalent it is in children.

Our most vulnerable populations are hit the hardest. The health data shows us that low-income people, people of color, and those with limited education levels don't have access to the resources and amenities to make the healthy choice the easy choice. And in turn, they experience unhealthier, shorter lives. The average age of death of the communities in our County differ dramatically. Some communities can expect to live to 80 years of age, while others average 61 years of age. Some neighborhoods have many of the elements that help communities live long and healthy lives while others have few. This is unfair and a course we are working to correct. All our communities should have access to the opportunities that enable their wellbeing.

While we face these challenges, we also have the solutions and we're implementing them every day. I'm passionate about this work and thankful to have all of you as partners to make an even greater impact.

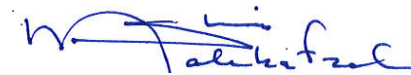
This has been an important month for us and the Get Healthy initiative. Our 2010 to 2015 strategic plan has come to a close and we are looking ahead at the next few years and asking ourselves and our network how to best focus our attention as we work to transform places and promote health equity to make the healthy choice the easy choice for all. While we continue to think our focus areas of food access, daily physical activity, and school wellness are important, it's a good time to check-in with community and institutional partners, look closely at the data,

and review best practices to identify the most pressing issues and opportunities for our county today and in the foreseeable future.

So far, we've had two community visioning workshops to hear from leaders and partners, and we have three more to go. Thanks to all who participated in our February 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> workshops! We've had rich conversations about the important features of a healthy equitable community that facilitates health and ensures our most vulnerable populations have the opportunities needed to prosper. We want everyone in our county to be able to reach their full potential without leaving anyone behind.

For those of you who haven't participated in a workshop yet, we want to hear from you. Please sign up now! We have three Visioning Workshops in the next two weeks [on February 26<sup>th</sup>, March 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>](#). We also have our [School Wellness Alliance Summit tomorrow](#). Please join us and come say hello.

I hope to get a chance to meet each of you this year. Looking forward to connecting and working more closely together!



Shireen Malekafzali, Senior Manager for Policy, Planning and Equity

*Staff Perspective: February 2015*

