

HealthScore

Metrics that Matter for Healthy and Resilient Neighborhoods

Why Do Metrics Matter for Neighborhood Development?

Now more than ever, leaders are focused on directing resources and investments to protect and improve community health, wealth and resilience. Without good data and the tools to make sense of it, these investments frequently fail to achieve their intended impacts.

That's why we created HealthScore, a comprehensive impact scorecard for the Healthy Neighborhoods Equity Fund (HNEF). Launched in partnership with Massachusetts Housing Investment Corporation, HNEF invests in high-impact, transit-oriented real estate developments that have the potential to transform neighborhoods, strengthen community and environmental health, and promote regional equity while providing attractive risk-adjusted returns for investors.

Our scorecard is a model for how to measure and track the ways that real estate development can improve community health and sustainability by:

- reversing historic patterns of segregation and disinvestment;
- increasing housing stability and economic opportunity;
- reducing climate-damaging emissions; and
- protecting people and property from climate risks.

Measuring the potential impacts of a development with a comprehensive screening tool helps educate real estate developers about how their work impacts health and environmental conditions, provides greater transparency in the development process and holds developers accountable to investors, residents, and the larger community.



Using HealthScore to Screen Neighborhoods and Developments

HealthScore is a screening tool that offers a holistic and actionable vision for healthy, inclusive and sustainable housing and mixed-use development. CLF uses HealthScore to understand the neighborhood context and screen potential HNEF investments on how well a development responds to the needs, strengths and vision of the people who live there. HealthScore incorporates findings from two Health Impact Assessments, published scientific research and the lived experience of residents in communities where new development is taking place. The result is a comprehensive scorecard with more than 100 metrics designed to maximize benefits for people, communities and the environment.

If an HNEF development meets eligibility criteria, the investment screening team evaluates potential investments based on measures related to the development and its neighborhood context. CLF then generates a score for the overall potential impact. Finally, the CLF team monitors a sub-set of these measures and reports on performance following construction at five- and ten-year marks to monitor how the development is performing and how the neighborhood is changing.

What are the Building Blocks of a Healthy Neighborhood?

Safe, stable, and affordable homes, reliable public transit, walkable streets, quality jobs and schools, green space and healthy food are the building blocks of healthy neighborhoods.

But not everyone has access to a healthy neighborhood. Across the region, stark differences in neighborhood conditions are contributing to major differences in health and well-being for the people who live there. For example, the average life expectancy in Newton, Massachusetts is 94 years compared to just 68 years in New Bedford. And the climate crisis will only worsen these disparities. Tackling these health and environmental challenges require sustained public and private investment, guided by local residents and informed by the best available data.

HNEF invests in real estate development that meets the following criteria:

- 1. Community Support:** Through our Healthy Neighborhoods Study, we've learned that when residents feel that the neighborhood is changing in a way that benefits and includes them, it's better for their health. We invest in developments that are planned through authentic engagement with local residents, organizations and public officials.
- 2. Walkable and Transit Oriented:** You shouldn't need a car to live in quality housing you can afford. We invest in development near public transit so that residents can easily and safely get to jobs, schools and other destinations without a car.
- 3. Mixed Income and Mixed Use:** Mixed-income developments are linked to greater housing stability and community safety, as well as improved mental health for lower-income residents. Co-locating housing and commercial space puts people close to jobs and services, and contributes to more active, vibrant streets. We invest in mixed-income, mixed-use developments that provide quality housing for people across income levels, occupations and household sizes. We also invest in buildings with ground-floor uses that provide jobs, amenities and services to the neighborhood.
- 4. Healthy Design:** The health, well-being and economic success of our communities are tightly linked to the health and well-being of our environment, and vice versa. We invest in developments that respond to the community's vision for becoming healthy, environmentally responsible and resilient. We motivate developers to use best practices in health-promoting building materials and energy-efficient, lower-carbon developments.
- 5. Equitable and Inclusive Development:** New developments come with the risk of displacing current residents by driving up housing costs and making existing residents feel unwelcome. We invest in housing and commercial space that is affordable, welcoming and inclusive to existing residents and newcomers. We support development that creates new opportunities for economic advancement and increases access to excellent K-12 public schools for low and moderate-income families.

HealthScore Screening Criteria Include:



Housing Choice and Affordability

Flood Supplement

Sustainable Transportation

Neighborhood Walkability

Operational Health and Safety

Low-Carbon Buildings

Access to Green Space

Climate-Resilient Sites

Transportation Access and Utilization

Healthy Food Access

Economic Opportunity

Neighborhood Screening Criteria



Community Vision and Priorities

Neighborhood or community-wide plans, infrastructure investments and zoning policies support walkable, mixed-use, mixed-income sustainable development.



Opportunity to Reduce Health Disparities:

The neighborhood has gaps in key population health measures like life expectancy compared to state averages, OR the development will increase access to a neighborhood with excellent K-12 public education by introducing affordable, family-sized units.



Transportation Access and Utilization

Distance to public transit, transit frequency and type of transit use indicate the potential for walkability and public transit use as part of everyday activities.



Opportunity to Advance Regional Equity

Poverty, unemployment, educational attainment and other metrics indicate disparities across the region.

Development Screening Criteria



Neighborhood Walkability

Streets are designed for safe, convenient and comfortable walking and biking for users of all ages and abilities.



Responsive and Inclusive Development

Community residents, local organizations and public officials have been authentically engaged and have expressed support for the development.



Housing Choice and Affordability

Housing options are affordable for people earning a range of incomes and the development accommodates a variety of household types and sizes.



Economic Opportunity

Design and construction of the development creates economic opportunities for local residents, people of color and women, and permanent jobs are created through the expansion of health-promoting enterprises within the development.



Healthy Food Access

Full-service grocery stores, community gardens and farmers' markets are nearby and accessible to residents of the development.



Access to Green Space

High quality parks and green spaces are nearby and accessible to residents of the development.



Low-Carbon Buildings

Buildings integrate environmentally sustainable design strategies to reduce energy and water use and improve indoor air quality and resident comfort and well-being.



Climate-Resilient Sites

Landscaping uses environmentally sustainable strategies to limit water use, reduce runoff, increase trees and green space, and avoid light pollution.



Operational Health and Safety

Developments incorporate planning and strategies for emergency preparedness and safety.



Sustainable Transportation

Developments integrate parking for electric vehicles and bicycles.



Flood Supplement

Developments within the 100- or 500-year flood plain integrate a range of design strategies to increase resilience to flooding.

Using HealthScore beyond HNEF investments

In addition to serving as an eligibility screening tool for HNEF II, HealthScore can also help other investors, planners and advocates assess and promote development that supports health and sustainability with a focus on the people and places that need it most. HealthScore can help to:

- guide both private and public investment to achieve positive change in communities
- bridge climate and housing advocacy and action
- help inform land use, zoning and building codes and standards, as well as policy decisions



About

Interested in learning more about HealthScore at the Conservation Law Foundation?
Learn more at: healthscore.clf.org

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