

# The OPINE (Asterhill's Blog)

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## COMMUNITY HEALTH: *Health literacy and leadership in making healthy communities*

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What does it mean to have a healthy community? Can it really be achieved? Is it a destination or a journey? A lot of professions are talking about making communities healthier. For example, Urban Planners, Architects, Engineers and other professionals engaged in shaping our environments are discussing this within the scope of their expertise. Leadership groups and healthcare organizations such as hospitals are engaged in changing their health cultures. Politicians are busy debating health care, who should have it, when it should be available and who is going to pay for it. All communities across the United States have organizations battling drug abuse and addictions. Social media debates the problems, places blame, talks of corruption and yet is not engaged in finding answers. Academia is teaching the elements of public health and pushing students to be agents of positive social change.

I think it can be said, we are engaged with the issue. What is ironic is we are not talking to each other. Yes, there is some cross talk. The first problem is health literacy. Many professions have their own technical language and acronyms that do not easily cross into the mainstream. The second problem is the disconnect between professions and leaders. The third problem is the lack of a mechanism that engages the different disciplines and professions to a common outcome. Yes, some non-profits do engage different professionals to the mission of that non-profit, but this is limited and very narrow in scope.

Let's illustrate this issue with an example; a municipality in the northeastern part of the United States recently completed updating their Master plan. The process included planners, municipality officials, local business officials, community leaders, and public participation. During one of the workshops the issue of employing more residents from the municipality was discussed. Everyone agreed that all efforts should be made to hire residents first to help reduce poverty and unemployment.

A couple of local businesses stated they try to hire residents first, but the prospective employee can't pass the drug test. A suggestion was made to get social services more engaged. A Social Service representative states they are under staffed and don't have the budget, plus why is this, their problem. Upon approval of the updated Master Plan, the municipality's legislative body posed one question back to the planning department, "Who is going to implement this plan?" Is this a health literacy or leadership problem?

So many have started to have the conversation about becoming healthier, should we perceive this as a good start? What are your thoughts and how would you address these problems?