



Prevention Institute is committed to building a collaborative movement among health professionals and environmental advocates.

ESM Partner

Prevention Institute

Improving Community Health through Primary Prevention

The San Francisco Bay Area is home to a variety of organizations concerned with improving human health. But one—the Prevention Institute—has the unique mission of improving community health and well-being by building momentum for effective primary *prevention*. A nonprofit national center located in Oakland, California, the Institute defines *primary prevention* as “taking action to build resilience and to prevent problems before they occur.” Founded in 1997 by Executive Director Larry Cohen, the center is committed to engaging communities in promoting equitable health outcomes across social and economic groups. To date, its programs have focused on health disparities, injury and violence prevention, traffic safety, nutrition and physical activity, and youth development.

One emphasis of the Institute that has particular resonance with the philosophy and mission of the Teleosis Institute is its focus on links between health and the physical environment. Says Prevention Institute Program Coordinator Linda Shak, “The environment that surrounds us has a major influence on our health and well-being. Clean air, water, and soil are critical components to good health, and prevention plays a key role. For example, ensuring a clean water supply prevents many infectious diseases, and enforcing clean air standards can help lower asthma rates. Sustainable agricultural practices (e.g., using fewer pesticides and artificial fertilizers) produce more nutrient-rich soil and healthier food. There is a tremendous potential for alliances between environmentalists who are trying to protect the earth and public health advocates who work to prevent disease.”

The Prevention Institute addresses several aspects of the “environment.” Linda Shak states, “In addition to the physical environment, we also take into account the social and built environments—the ways in which issues such as planning and zoning and social connections affect health not only directly, but also indirectly, through behaviors and changing norms.” The Institute’s recently released THRIVE is a toolkit

for health and resilience in vulnerable environments. THRIVE is a community assessment tool that helps residents and local leaders to identify and target those factors in the community environment that hold the most promise for improving health outcomes and reducing disparities. THRIVE delineates 13 factors in the environment that are linked with health. It provides an opportunity to bring together the goals of social justice, environmental health, and prevention of chronic disease and to develop strategies for alleviating poverty, racism, and other forms of oppression in communities.

Another Prevention Institute project is “Building Bridges: Linking Public Health and the Sustainable Agriculture Movement.” Developed to strengthen momentum for a just, sustainable, health-promoting food system, the Institute has joined forces with health and public health advocates and the sustainable agriculture movement. They share such goals as reducing exposure to toxic chemicals in food, increasing access to affordable, fresh, high quality farm products, and ensuring a clean water supply.

Managing Director Leslie Mikkelsen says, “It is clear that food is one of the most fundamental issues affecting human health and the health of the environment. Therefore, creating a sustainable food system that supports healthy consumption habits has the potential to be a central goal for both sustainable agriculture and health care, and to have resonance community-wide.” The findings of “Building Bridges” are published in “Cultivating Common Ground: Linking Health and Sustainable Agriculture” (available as a PDF); it includes recommendations for building a collaborative movement among health professionals and environmental advocates.

Cultivating Common Ground pdf:
http://preventioninstitute.org/pdf/Cultivating_Common_Ground_112204.pdf

THRIVE pdf: http://preventioninstitute.org/pdf/THRIVE_execusumm_web_020105.pdf

Prevention Institute

265 29th Street
 Oakland, CA 94611
 510-444-8027
www.preventioninstitute.org

