



General Plan Forums Scheduled

by David Gorn

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The state's Office of Planning and Research has launched a series of public forums this month to go over its **recently revised** General Plan Guidelines. Some health advocates are paying close attention, according to Ruben Cantu, associate director at the California Pan-Ethnic Health Network, a health advocacy group based in Oakland.

"The long-awaited revised general plan guidelines include new sections on how cities and counties can promote health communities and social equity in future development," Cantu said in a written statement.

"The guidelines can potentially impact health in many ways," he said.

The new health section for the General Plan Guidelines lists a number of elements in growth planning that may be critical to public health:

- "Housing affordability significantly impacts health," the state guidelines said, because heightened financial and personal stability allows consumers to focus on their health care needs and on securing healthy food;
- The location of housing could impact people's health, as well, by limiting drive time and being near parks or other recreational opportunities. Walkability, the report said, is influenced by neighborhood design;
- Ensuring that families have safe walking routes to schools can impact health; and
- In urban areas, health clinics could accompany housing developments and the elderly and disabled could benefit from tenant services.

"Given the health impacts of having access to safe, decent and affordable housing," the guidelines said, "it remains critical that jurisdictions plan for a variety of housing types and communities near schools, transit and other services. The housing element allows jurisdictions to identify opportunities and adopt policies for housing development that benefits positive health outcomes."

Cantu said CPEHN will have a number of workshops across the state to help educate and define health concerns for possible inclusion in the guidelines, starting in Fresno on Nov. 10.