



For immediate release

Contact: Maria Bernabe, 310.735.9184, Maria.Bernabe@lung.org

Lung Association says better planning could save millions in health costs

County leaders have opportunity to save \$139 million annually

Central Valley, Calif. – March 19, 2014 - As the deadline approaches for Kern County leaders to adopt new growth strategies, a just-released report from the American Lung Association in California finds the right decisions could, by 2035, save \$139 million a year in health costs to county residents.

The report, *Public Health at the Crossroads*, offers fresh data on public health benefits that smarter, more compact and walkable development would bring to the San Joaquin Valley, whose residents live with some of the worst air pollution problems in the country.

“As a lung surgeon, I see the impacts of poor community design on my patients’ lungs and health,” said Stephen Maxwell, MD, a thoracic surgeon and local leadership board member with the American Lung Association in California. “We simply can’t continue a pattern of growth that is designed almost exclusively for cars and contributes to air pollution and lung disease. We need to grow healthy communities.”

Under the Sustainable Communities Act (SB 375), Valley counties are making new blueprints for growth planning over the next two decades. These blueprints—called Sustainable Communities Strategies—will steer traffic and pollution trends. The right strategies could save money—and lives.

Public Health at the Crossroads evaluates the benefits Valley residents could experience if leaders plan for communities that more walkable and interconnected with existing neighborhoods and commercial centers. The report finds that healthier planning could reduce health costs for Valley residents by \$416 million a year by 2035, with \$139 million in health benefits in Kern County alone.

These estimates are likely to be conservative because they are based on reductions in traffic pollution alone, and don’t take into account health benefits from increased physical activity, thus, the total cost savings could be even more significant.

“Given the results of this report, the American Lung Association in California is calling on local leaders to move away from business-as-usual planning and toward a healthier vision,” said Bonnie Holmes-Gen, Senior Director of Policy and Advocacy for the American Lung Association

in California. “Air quality and health can improve greatly in communities that are more vibrant and active, with real walking, biking and transit opportunities.”

With more walkable communities connected to commercial centers, the report projects reductions in pollution-related outcomes and health costs in Kern that by 2035 would represent an annual:

- \$139 million in reduced traffic pollution-related health and economic impacts
- 4,829 fewer asthma attacks and other respiratory health impacts
- 759 fewer lost work days

Over the next few months, Valley leaders will either adopt policies that steer toward a healthier future, or continue with growth and development scenarios that are costly, unhealthy, and polluting.

“We can’t afford another generation of unhealthy planning,” said Holmes-Gen.

With the release of *Public Health at the Crossroads*, the American Lung Association in California is calling on elected leaders around Kern County to:

- Adopt a strong Sustainable Communities Strategy that moves beyond “business-as-usual” planning of the past
- Plan a more balanced housing mix that limits over-investment in inefficient large lots and preserves natural and agricultural lands
- Prioritize growth and transportation investments to serve existing downtowns and community cores, rather than fringe areas or new towns
- Front-load investments that enhance walking, biking and transit options
- Promote infill, transit oriented development and access to transit, Bus Rapid Transit and other innovative cleaner air transportation options
- Focus investments to “fix it first” maintenance, rather than building expensive new roads Support more efficient and zero- and near-zero emission freight strategies
- Invest in planning models such as UrbanFootprint that can estimate health impacts and benefits of future planning scenarios

San Joaquin Valley communities face air pollution challenges unparalleled in the United States. Air pollution burdens Valley residents, slowing the growth and development of children’s lungs, harming children’s immune systems, and perhaps—according to research—even changing DNA. Valley communities are also seeing spikes in other chronic illnesses including child obesity and diabetes.

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