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**Lung Association says better planning could save millions in health costs**

*County leaders have opportunity to save \$47 million annually*

Central Valley, Calif. – March 19, 2014 - As the deadline for San Joaquin County leaders to adopt new growth strategies approaches, a new report from the American Lung Association in California finds the right decisions could, by 2035, save \$47 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 are 75% more walkable and interconnected with existing neighborhoods and commercial centers. For Valley residents as a whole, the report finds, smarter planning could reduce health costs by \$416 million a year by 2035, with \$47 million in health benefits experienced in San Joaquin County alone.

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

“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 San Joaquin County that by 2035 would represent an annual:

- \$47 million in reduced traffic pollution-related health and economic impacts
- 5,070 fewer asthma attacks and other respiratory health impacts
- 942 fewer lost work days -related health and economic impacts

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 county leaders to:

- Adopt strong Sustainable Community Strategies that move beyond the “business-as-usual” planning of the past
- Prioritize growth and transportation investments to serve existing downtowns and community cores, rather than concentrating on fringe areas or new towns
- Front-load investments that enhance walking, biking and transit options
- Promote infill, transit-oriented development and expanded access to transit, Bus Rapid Transit and other innovative cleaner-air transportation options
- Focus investments on “fix it first” maintenance, rather than building expensive new roads
- Plan a more balanced housing mix that limits over-investment in inefficient large lots and preserves natural and agricultural lands
- 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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