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Vision for Sustainable Greater Boston 2050

Health and Well-Being

In the year 2050, the vast majority of Boston residents are healthy citizens with active, productive lifestyles. In the last fifty years, an overhaul of the region's health care system towards universal access has made quality care available and affordable for the entire populace. Boston's high level medical services are now accessible to people of all races and socio-economic groups. The region leads the country in a shift towards a more equitable and efficient health care system. In 2005, the U.S. spent more per capita on health care than any other country in the world, yet millions of Americans still lacked sufficient care. In 2050, the U.S. spends far less on health care, yet every individual receives treatment through a more efficient health care delivery system. In addition, Boston residents benefit from decreased incidence of illnesses induced by environmental pollution and inactive lifestyles. These developments, combined with a concerted government-sector effort to eradicate urban poverty have greatly reduced the gross inequities in health outcomes among income groups within the region. Disparities in the rates of infant mortality, asthma, breast cancer, and heart disease have been narrowed greatly, converging at lower levels for all populations.

A significant decrease in pollution from industry and transportation has been an important factor in enhancing the health of many citizens. People rely less on private motorized vehicles and more on an efficient public transportation system, and the vehicles still on the road are hybrids and/or powered by renewables or natural gas. Trains, car-sharing, buses, a light rail system, and bikes increasingly replace individual cars, as people live and work in close proximity to transportation centers. The resulting reduction of particulates in the air has lowered incidences of asthma and respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. Cleaner water and reduced bioaccumulation of mercury and other toxins in fish has augmented citizens' health in addition to diminishing the number of children with birth defects and chronic illnesses.

Food production processes exclude the use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers that have been linked to certain endocrine and nervous system disorders. Instead, residents receive the majority of their food from local, organic farms. In addition, most people have reduced their overall caloric intake and shifted to vegetarian-based diets. By doing so, they have increased the energy efficiency of the food production process and decreased their risk of many health problems associated with high meat intake including heart disease, hypertension, and type 2 diabetes.

No longer are residents of Boston exemplary of the American public who, as of 2005, constituted the most overweight population on earth. The statistic that 61% of Americans and 25% of American children are overweight or obese has decreased dramatically due to a shift in diet and

the adoption of more active lifestyles. As urban areas are redefined as mixed-use spaces, citizens are able to walk and bike to many of their daily destinations, rather than being confined to their cars. Moreover, the region's parks and rivers are in close proximity to homes, schools and commercial districts, enhancing the opportunities for recreation and exercise.

Public parks, community gardens, car-sharing and pedestrian-friendly spaces, have all enhanced Boston as a vibrant, friendly, multi-cultural urban community. The general well-being of Boston residents has improved dramatically. Citizens who were once over-worked and over-scheduled, rushing from one place to the next in the isolation of their own private vehicles, are now less isolated and benefit significantly from their surroundings. With the average work week reduced to 30 hours, residents of the region have considerably more free time to spend on leisure activities, including exercise and socializing with family and others in the community.

The Boston area continues to be considered a medical mecca, with globally respected hospitals and medical schools along with a world renowned biotechnology and life sciences sector. Collectively, these provide a significant job base for the region.

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