

# Government play role in health?

## You bet.



**Liz Freeman** Naples Daily News  
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

The City of Naples and Collier County made the list.

Both government entities are among 46 communities in the state that are "healthy community champions" for 2018, a recognition by the Florida Department of Health.

In Lee County, the City of Sanibel made the list this year.

Local governments have taken steps in recent years with policies that can help increase residents' physical activity and spur them to other healthier practices, according to the state agency. The impact is through the "built environment" where people live, work and play.

For instance, municipalities increase residents' opportunities for physical activity by creating open green spaces with parks, by adding sidewalks and bike paths, and by permitting farmers' markets with affordable fresh fruits and vegetables.

Stephanie Vick, health officer for the Florida Department of Health in Collier, said the department is proud to be a partner with the city and the county in the endeavor.

"Their utilization of parks and recreation space, work with the Blue Zones Project, and commitment to a healthy workforce, along with efforts to implement policies to encourage residents and visitors to improve their well-being, are important in ensuring that Collier County is the healthiest county to live, work, and play," Vick said in a statement.

In Collier and south Lee counties, various



**Dan Buettner**

businesses, government entities, residential communities, churches and other entities are embracing the Blue Zones Project, a wellness and longevity initiative that the NCH Healthcare System introduced to the region in 2015.

The initiative involves helping businesses and other groups adopt healthier practices, such as promoting walking breaks at work and offering nutritious snacks instead of donuts at meetings. The belief is the changes will become permanent habits and improve overall health.

The Blue Zones is based on the travels of Dan Buettner, who identified communities worldwide where people share lifestyle traits and live to 100 or older.

He wrote a New York Times bestseller about the nine principles of longevity and developed a program blueprint for how to adopt the principles.

The "Power Nine" include moving naturally by being physically active, eating a plant-slant diet, knowing your purpose in life, taking time to relax, having a healthy social network, putting loved ones first and others.

The Blue Zones contracts with health consultants, currently the digital-based ShareCare, to work in communities to help companies, government agencies, residential communities incorporate Blue Zones practices.

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# Blue Zones

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To date, more than 180 companies and other entities in the region have gained Blue Zones recognition.

Some of the incentives for pursuing the Blue Zones include reduced health insurance costs, improved employee retention and productivity, and reduced absenteeism.

## Encouraging healthy habits

Local governments submitted applications to the state for consideration as a healthy community champions this spring. Winners were announced July 9.

Collier county's application showed land development policies address ways to increase physical activity of residents through 95 miles of bicycle lanes, 193 miles of sidewalks and 32 miles of shared use paths.

The county operates 18 parks, which include nature preserves, skate parks, a water park, and sports complexes.

In terms of influence over residents' nutrition habits, the county has a food policy committee that works with the Blue Zones to help promote access to healthy foods.

There are roughly 15 farmers markets in locations that are accessible to lower income neighborhoods, and several accept state food assistance benefits. On Fridays, a farmers' market operates at the Collier government parking garage

for county and state employees in the government complex. The market is near the public transportation terminal for people who use the Collier Area Transit system.

The City of Naples' application points to several projects that improve pedestrian and biking activities through two roundabouts on Central Avenue, and one at Tenth Street South and Third Avenue South that are designed to slow drivers; coupled with green bike lane on Central.

The application includes the amenities of Baker Park; the pedestrian bridge to connect to the Gordon River Greenway; and the driveway connections policy to address public right and for future bike lanes and sidewalks.

The city was an early adopter of the Blue Zones, has a 140 acres of parks within its 16.5 square miles of corporate limits and maintains 42 beach access locations. In addition, the city hosts numerous athletic events, according to its application.

The state's surgeon general and DOH secretary, Dr. Celeste Philip, lauded the 46 cities and county governments that are healthy community champions.

"I am pleased to recognize local communities (which) have shown a special commitment to improving the health of their residents," Dr. Celeste Philip, DOH secretary, said in a news release. "Their efforts to implement policies that empower residents and visitors to improve their health are an important part of creating healthy environments throughout Florida."