



BLUE ZONES PROJECT®



Blue Zones Project Case Study: Beach Cities

In Southern California, the Beach Cities– Hermosa Beach, Manhattan Beach, and Redondo Beach – have miles of ocean frontage and are popular beaches in Los Angeles County due to the excellent surf, mild climate, and lively beach culture. Yet, in 2010, a Gallup survey showed that the Beach Cities had some of the nation's highest levels of anger, stress, and worry, in addition to increased rates of obesity and smoking.¹ In response, the Beach Cities Health District (BCHD) made a commitment to support the Blue Zones Project in 2010 and, subsequently, became the largest community to achieve Blue Zones certification just six years later. The initial project investment of \$1.8 million over the first three years yielded a remarkable return for BCHD, as investments from the well-being company Healthways attracted outside funding for an additional \$3.5 million that was spent on the project.² Notably, this transformative initiative sparked measurable, positive changes in each of the three cities.

Built Environment

In 2011, changes to make the Beach Cities more walkable and bikeable were made through the first-ever bicycle planning effort involving multiple jurisdictions – the South Bay Bicycle Master Plan – along with the adoption of the Beach Cities Livability Plan and Living Streets policies. Hermosa Beach was the first city in the U.S. to adopt a Living Streets Policy that focuses on making city streets safer for all and was recognized by the National Complete Streets Coalition as the 2nd strongest among the more than 100 Complete Streets policies adopted that year (2012). Collectively, \$8.1 million in transportation funding was secured for livability projects, with a planned 200-mile regional bicycle network, including bike lanes and protected bike paths that connect neighboring communities. From 2010 to 2020, Beach Cities residents increased their rates of physical activity by 11% and decreased their rates of overweight and obesity by 30%. Comparatively, the national rate of overweight and obesity increased by 10% during this time.³



Food Systems

A collective impact model was used in the Beach Cities to bring a network of community members, organizations, and institutions together to integrate their actions with a common goal: building healthier options into the places people spend most of their time.⁴ There are now over 100 Blue Zones Project Approved Restaurants and five Blue Zones Project Approved Grocery Stores, including the first major grocery store chain (Lazy Acres). In Redondo Beach K-5 schools, policy changes in lunch programs and healthy school programming (i.e. garden lessons, nutrition education, healthier meal and snack options) led to a staggering decline in childhood obesity rates. In 2007, one in five Redondo Beach elementary school students were obese – higher than the national average. By 2022, the obesity rate had dropped to 5.9%, equating to a 70.5% reduction.⁵ Meanwhile, the national childhood obesity rate increased from 16% to 18% over the same period.

Tobacco

In 2010, Hermosa Beach and Redondo Beach had some of the highest smoking rates in Los Angeles County (17.4% and 16%, respectively)⁶, costing employers, on average, \$6,000 extra per person per year for every tobacco user compared to a non-smoker.⁷ Since then, the Beach Cities have enacted comprehensive smoke free bans in public places, established tobacco retail licensing, and banned the sale of flavored tobacco products. In 2020, Manhattan Beach gained national attention as it became only the second city in the U.S. to ban the sale of all tobacco products and electronic smoking/vaping devices. Since the launch of the Blue Zones Project, smoking rates in the Beach Cities have decreased 45% – only 6% of Beach Cities residents smoke as of 2020.

Gallup estimates the Beach Cities saved at least \$21 million in direct medical expenses and \$21 million in reduced lost productivity with a total of \$42 million in value due to policy, system, and environmental changes to the built environment, food systems, and tobacco control efforts to make the healthy choice, the easy choice.⁸

For more information, please contact: builtenvironment@bluezones.com

Footnotes

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3. Beach Cities Health District. (2022). 2022-2025 Beach Cities Health District Community Health Report. https://bchd.blob.core.windows.net/docs/bchd/CommunityHealthReport_2022-2025_web_031122.pdf
4. Riley C, Roy B, Lam V, et al. (2021). Can a collective-impact initiative improve well-being in three US communities? Findings from a prospective repeated cross-sectional study. *BMJ Open*, 11(12), 1-10. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2020-048378>
5. County of Los Angeles Department of Public Health, Beach Cities Health District, Redondo Unified School District. (2020). Recent Trends in Childhood Obesity Prevalence in the Redondo Beach Unified School District: A Case Study. http://www.bchdfiles.com/docs/ys/rbusd_bmi_report_june2020_lr.pdf
6. County of Los Angeles Department of Public Health. (2010). Cigarette Smoking in Los Angeles County: Local Data to Inform Tobacco Policy. http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/ha/reports/habriefs/2007/Cigarette_Smoking_Cities_finalS.pdf
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8. Blue Zones Project Results: Beach Cities, CA. Blue Zones. <https://www.bluezones.com/blue-zones-project-results-beach-cities-ca/>