

A New Era of Collaboration, Equity, and Community Leadership in the City of Springfield

As a grant-funded partner in the Climate Change Health and Equity (CCHE) network, the Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts (PHIWM) has supported Live Well Springfield's Climate Justice Initiative to advocate for policies to advance clean energy and racial and health equity in the City of Springfield. Their efforts align with the overall [CCHE Theory of Change](#) as part of Strategy 3. [Live Well Springfield Coalition](#) includes over thirty organizations and is co-convened by PHWIM and Pioneer Valley Planning Commission.

PHIWM is a backbone organization founded to support communities in their efforts to become measurably healthier and more equitable through community engagement, convening collaborative partnerships, communications, data analysis, research and evaluation, and policy advocacy. PHIWM's CCHE-funded activities as a co-convenor of the Live Well Springfield Coalition (LWS) are outlined in a 2022 CCHE theory of change [here \(slide 27\)](#) and described in more detail below. With LWS Core Team partners Arise for Social Justice, PVPC, and Way Finders, PHIWM convenes the Climate Justice Initiative. Through these efforts, LWS has had tremendous success in the adoption of Community Choice Energy in late 2022; the City is now making progress towards implementation. LWS has also observed enhanced relationships and collaboration with partners, growth of resident power and leadership, and a deepened commitment on the part of City government to engaging and valuing the role of residents in city processes and policies. "The level of excitement, collaboration, and commitment to engaging w/ residents is completely different. [...] There has been a massive transformation in how city staff understand the importance of working with residents on the frontlines who are most affected by climate change. That is a unique dynamic we're not seeing in other cities in the region."



Mission:

PHIWM builds measurably healthier and more equitable communities and is the founding and convening member of Live Well Springfield (LWS), a community coalition building and sustaining a culture of health in Springfield.

Policies, Activities, and Initiatives Advanced During the CCHE Initiative

Advanced adoption of the Community Choice Energy (CCE) policy in which the City works with an aggregator to switch residents to 100% clean electricity. PHIWM and their partners in LWS engaged residents, community partners, City staff, and champions on the City Council to build support for this policy and, in December 2022, those efforts paid off when the [Springfield City Council unanimously supported CCE adoption and implementation in the city](#). CCE is an energy-supply option that would allow residents in the City of Springfield to get up to 100% of its electricity from clean, renewable energy such as solar and wind power. This policy was one of the main policy objectives of PHIWM's work within the CCHE initiative. LWS invested in sharing information about CCE and activating and empowering the community to advocate for this policy. The diverse partnerships in the LWS Coalition bolstered their outreach and advocacy efforts as different organizations brought different influence and relationships .

As of September 2024, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities was in the process of reviewing the proposal from the City's energy aggregator, after which LWS will engage residents and the public to ensure everyone understands how CCE will be implemented in Springfield. When CCE is fully implemented, PHWIM expects to see a positive impact on emissions and human health and will track data to understand those impacts. From 2011 to 2023, they have already seen a 26% reduction in emissions across municipalities in Western Massachusetts. PHIWM's health data also shows a reduction in asthma rates and emergency department visits, though these numbers reflect a variety of factors including reduced healthcare utilization during the pandemic.

Advocated for a Race and Health Equity Impact Assessment (RHEIA) tool to support other efforts at the city, state, and federal level to undo the impacts of segregation and inequitable access to opportunity by proposing a Community Benefits Ordinance; the ordinance would mandate neighborhood-specific investments by developers who receive tax breaks or other government subsidies to foster racial and socioeconomic integration and improve public health outcomes. After researching what other cities in the country were doing to undo the impacts of segregation and disparate access to opportunity and learning, LWS learned that most cities were focused on hiring and procurement. PHIWM and LWS partners worked with technical assistance (TA) providers from the CCHE initiative, particularly the Network for Public Health Law, to research and identify best practices from municipalities that were working to address segregation, race, and health equity issues externally, and landed on a Community Benefits Ordinance. They worked with another CCHE TA partner, Metropolitan Group, to develop communications and messaging that would resonate with the City government and the Mayor. Springfield declared racism a public health emergency in 2020 and this proposed work of moving from a Community Benefits Agreement to a Community Benefits Ordinance—bringing the force of law to the table—builds on that awareness and commitment to action. Regulatory change is slow, but the City is interested in and engaged in determining how a Community Benefits Ordinance can be integrated into the City's existing Community Benefits Agreement work. Ultimately, LWS expects that the Community Benefits Ordinance would expand access to opportunity in targeted neighborhoods, thereby decreasing the impact of segregation in housing for residents. An LWS partner said, "This [process has been] about the journey of learning how to make change w/ systemic issues... our power was [in] finding out "how" and [this process also] activated residents to push for reparations. It opened up another path for change that could be more transformational."

Supplemented City staff data collection and research to develop persuasive campaign materials and developed messaging with residents to advance the campaigns. This strategy has been core to LWS' impact in Springfield. As one example, LWS produced a [Community Choice Energy video](#) with support of Metropolitan Group to communicate policy priorities in plain language for both community and government. They received very positive feedback from both audiences and the video has also helped other towns explain CCE to their residents. The LWS Coalition has also engaged residents through arts and culture events and partners to build awareness and engagement. For example, LWS partnered with Fresh Paint Springfield to develop a climate justice mural and with Blues to Green to share about climate and health issues and policies during music and culture events.

Select Resources and Media

- [Building a culture of health in the era of climate change](#), The Daily Climate Op-Ed, March 2022
- [Partnerships, Power of Convening Help Live Well Springfield Coalition Advance Climate Policies](#), Kresge, January 2023
- [Red Lines and Black Neighborhoods: A History of Race and Segregation in Springfield, Massachusetts](#), May 2024

Developed coalition structures that build capacity of residents through participation in the LWS Climate Justice Initiative CCHE committee, ongoing trainings, and other opportunities. Over the past several years of working with residents, LWS staff see residents becoming more knowledgeable, experienced, and successful advocates. Resident Advisors are a key part of the LWS model, which has supported immense capacity building around CCE and fostered leadership among resident advisors. This capacity building has helped to increase representation of community members who are climate justice advocates in city decision making processes. An LWS partner said, “The City respects that Resident Advisor role and wants more of it.” The CCHE initiative was a key space to develop the Resident Advisor model for community engagement, and the model is now expanding to other coalitions and towns with whom LWS partners work. For example, LWS successfully advocated for the state Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness program to include funding for community engagement and resident advisors. LWS coalition members also see a new readiness and leadership from community members to lead conversations about racial justice and reparations in the City of Springfield, saying, “Now our residents are pushing for reparations, because we took the time to build the structure so people can find their voice.”

Another way LWS built capacity of residents and developed bridges between government and residents was through an Extreme Heat Tabletop Exercise with Health Care Without Harm (HCWH), a Strategy 1 CCHE initiative network partner. LWS, along with local healthcare partners, residents, and city staff, participated to think about extreme heat solutions, process, and protocols together. The exercise is now written up in Climate Resilience for Health Care and Communities developed by HCWH. The exercise catalyzed broader discussions with LWS coalition and city departments they hadn’t worked with before, like the Emergency Management Department, which helped advance the successful adoption of the CCE.

Key Partners

Organization	Type
Arise for Social Justice	Funded Partner/Core Team
Arts and Culture Organizations	Community Partner
Baystate Health System	Health Partner
Blues to Green	Community Partner
Caring Health Center	Health Partner
City Government Staff	Government Partner
Commonwealth Murals/Fresh Paint Springfield	Community Partner
Mercy Medical Center	Health Partner
Live Well Springfield Committee	Convening Partner
Neighbor to Neighbor	Funded Partner/Core Team
Pioneer Valley Planning Commission	Government Partner/ Core Team
Way Finders	Funded Partners/Core Team
10 Resident Advisors	Community Partners

Insights from CCHE Initiative

- **PHIWM and their partners are receiving increasing recognition and growing their influence and expertise in the field.** PHIWM and partners are recognized as experts in racial equity, clean energy, and climate action and have influence at not only a local but also a state level. For example, LWS partner Arise for Social Justice has been invited to join the state Commission for

Energy Infrastructure and Siting and the Climate Council due to their impactful work in racial equity and clean energy in urban communities. An LWS partner said, “I feel like I’ve found my voice in speaking about [climate, health, and equity issues and intersections] especially [because our] work has led me and others to be invited to panels and other conversations on these issues.” Funding from the CCHE initiative not only supported the progress of PHIWM and LWS partners’ work, but also provided validation and reputational capital. They said, “Getting Kresge funding validated the importance of our work, [and] it has had an important impact.”

- **Inclusive and intentional dialogue takes time, but is critical to build trust, strengthen relationships, and enable long-term, sustainable change.** Taking a deliberate and thoughtful pace ensures that all voices are heard ultimately makes the work more impactful and meaningful. Residents’ feedback on the pace of work has been invaluable and LWS has emphasized the importance of mindful discussions to truly address community concerns and build connections. This approach has transformed LWS and Resident Advocates into a supportive family, where feedback is given with empathy and care. Additionally, this work has created a new way of understanding intersectional issues. An LWS partner said, “After six years of this work, people really understand the connections between racism, climate crisis, and poor health outcomes. It’s the way people talk about these issues in Springfield now.”
- **Identify (and grow) your allies, leverage those relationships, and work to understand the issues that matter to decisionmakers in order to tailor messaging accordingly.** Adapting language while remaining true to the core issue and emphasizing how the policy or initiative in question will impact topics that matter to the audience is critical to influencing decision makers. LWS recommends not only knowing and leveraging your champions, but reaching out proactively to decision makers who may not be champions for the policy or initiative yet and let them know how it will benefit issues they and their constituencies care about.

Looking Ahead

LWS will continue to support implementation of the CCE and support resident awareness, education, and outreach to ensure accountability; work to advocate for a Community Benefits Ordinance; and update a greenhouse gas emissions inventory to track how CCE impacts emissions. Building on the collaborative relationships and work advanced during the CCHE initiative, the City of Springfield and PHIWM partnered and in July 2024 were [awarded a \\$20 million Community Change Grant through EPA](#) to help disadvantaged communities tackle environmental and climate justice challenges through projects that reduce pollution, increase community climate resilience, and build community capacity.