



# HEALTHY COMMUNITIES ACTION TEAM MEETING

## MEETING MINUTES

DECEMBER 11, 2025

### ATTENDANCE

Alec Ayers	Jennifer Hopkins	Jennifer Senick
Jackie Bavaro	Denise Lanza	Robin Vlamis
Serena Collado	Darby McDermott	Maria Baron
Ashley Costello	Osaigbovo Osemwegie	Camilla Comer-Carruthers
Amy Faus	Christine Schell	Loretta Kelly

### MEETING

Members were asked to introduce themselves by including their name and organization in the chat.

Camilla guided ACT members through a review of each objective, strategies, and resources under the 3 priority areas:

1. Environmental health,
2. Injury & violence prevention, and
3. Healthy eating and active living.

### ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

**Heat-related illness:** After reviewing the objective, strategies, and resources, one member noted that the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (NJBPU), in consultation with the NJ Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the New Jersey Interagency Council on Climate Resilience, launched the [Urban Heat Island \(UHI\) Mitigation Program](#), a \$5 million initiative to help NJ's most vulnerable communities combat extreme heat and rising energy costs during the summer. It was also noted that public indoor spaces like libraries and senior centers can provide a break from the heat as well as social opportunities. [Chill Out NJ](#) is an online tool that can be used to search for places within a 3-mile radius to seek relief from the heat. During heat waves, state and county agencies open access to cooling centers to help residents without access to air conditioning. Throughout the summer months, NJ211 updates the list of available cooling centers provided by state, county, or municipal offices of emergency management. The [Heat Hub NJ](#) website was also mentioned as a resource for information about extreme heat.

There was a question of whether it was possible to identify the populations that are most affected by extreme heat and whether athletes and those who work outdoors

are at increased risk. There was also a question about whether the Action Team should consider air quality in general, in addition to extreme heat. These questions will be explored and discussed at the next meeting.

The OSHA [Heat Safety Tool](#) was mentioned as an app for workers and supervisors to calculate the heat index for their worksite and use it to display a risk level for outdoor workers. The app also includes reminders about protective measures that should be taken at that risk level to protect workers from heat-related illnesses (i.e. reminders to drinking enough fluids, schedule rest breaks, adjust work operations, and planning for an emergency, etc.).

In reference to environmental health as a whole, it was noted that the [New Jersey Chapter of the American Planning Association](#) was awarded a 2-year [\\$1.5 million grant](#) in April 2025 from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) to advance public health through land use planning. This funding opportunity is an extension of a grant-funded program that produced numerous educational materials in both English and Spanish. Other heat and climate-related resources were mentioned:

- [NJ Public Health Adapt](#)
- [Rutgers Center for Urban Policy Research \(CUPR\)](#)
  - [CUPR Plan Alignment: Creating Comprehensive Health Plans](#)
- [i-Tree Landscape](#)
- [Sustainable Jersey's Heat Island Assessment & Mitigation Plan](#)

In addition, it was mentioned that members of the [Plan4HealthNJ](#) Project Team delivered a presentation exploring the intersection of planning and public health at the 2025 New Jersey Planning and Redevelopment Conference. The video link is <https://youtu.be/Piht0fO9OYE>

ACT members also discussed several additional health priorities reflected in the Access to Quality Care SHIP objectives:

**Vector-borne illness:** Lyme disease is the most frequently reported vector-borne illness in the United States and the most prevalent vector-borne disease tracked by the NJDOH's Communicable Disease Service (CDS). CDS maintains a [vector-borne disease data dashboard](#) to display vector-borne disease case counts, emergency department visits for tick-related illness, and other data. It was also noted that Lyme disease, and other vector borne diseases, are on the state's [One Health Task Force](#) agenda and that objectives and strategies should be aligned and coordinated. Additional resources were mentioned:

- [Fight the Bite, NJ!](#) Resources to address vector borne disease.
- [Vector-borne Surveillance Reports](#): arboviral activity map and weekly reports

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## INJURY & VIOLENCE

This priority area focuses on reducing fatality, serious injury, and exposure to violence and traumatic experiences with specific objectives aimed at reducing motor vehicle-related fatalities and serious injuries, eliminating racial/ethnic disparities in homicide rates, as well as disparities in Adverse Childhood Experiences.

**Motor vehicle-related injuries/fatalities:** Several objectives and measures were proposed for motor vehicle-related fatalities and serious injuries. Since the objectives for this State Health Improvement Plan center around prevention and health equity, it was suggested that the objective focus on seatbelt use, which has been shown to prevent serious injury and death in motor vehicle crashes. The seatbelt usage question in BRFSS is on a 3-year rotation so the data will only be available for 2023, 2026, and 2029. Mortality data is available annually, so that will be used as the measure of the prevention strategies.

It was noted that New Jersey currently has a proposed bill (A1487) to establish a rebate program for electric bicycle purchases, with the NJ Board of Public Utilities developing details for a statewide rollout as part of the NJ Energy Master Plan. There was a lengthy discussion of e-bikes, and other micromobility, as viable transportation options and the role that they play in transportation related fatalities and serious injuries. Additional information and resources were offered:

- [Rutgers's Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center](#)
  - [New-Jersey-Micromobility-Guide\\_2025.pdf](#)
  - [E-bike safety prompts warning from NJ police. What's legal in New Jersey?](#)

**Homicide:** The next objective to be discussed was the elimination of racial/ethnic disparities in homicide rates. A member noted that studies show that homicides and other violent crimes go up as temperatures rise and suggested that consideration be given to the connection between extreme heat and homicide. There was also a question about potential collaboration with the NJ Office of the Attorney General (OAG) with regards to homicide/violent crimes rates. Camilla confirmed that collaboration with the OAG will include recruitment of subject matter experts to support further development of strategies and actions.

**Adverse Childhood Experiences:** There were questions about the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) objective at the previous meeting. Camilla explained that while there are 3 sources of ACE data available, the National Survey of Children's Health captures all 10 of the original ACEs survey items and will be used as this objective's data source. She added that the NJ Department of Children and Families (DCF) – Office of Resilience has an [ACEs Action Plan](#) that includes the following strategies that can be incorporated into the HNJ2030 SHIP: (1) Achieve Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered State Designation; (2) Conduct an ACEs Public Awareness and

Mobilization Campaign; (3) Maintain Community-Driven Policy and Funding Priorities; (4) Provide Cross-Sector ACEs Training; and (5) Promote Trauma-Informed/Healing-Centered Services and Supports.

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## HEALTHY EATING & ACTIVE LIVING

The objectives under this priority area focus on food insecurity, obesity, and physical activity. Several partner organizations and programs were mentioned to assist with achieving the objectives:

- [New Jersey Recreation and Park Association](#): ParkRx and 10-minute Walk
- [NJ Department of Agriculture](#): community gardens, collaboratives, and summer food program
- [NJ Food Security Initiative Grantees](#)
- [NJ YMCA State Alliance](#): physical activity

The members also added resources to the chat:

- [NJ Food Security Initiative Factsheet](#) (Food Research & Action Center)
- [Hunger, Food Security and Maternal Health](#) (NJDOH)
- [Food Insecurity Index](#) (Trenton Health Team)

There were questions about whether to include strategies focused on identifying food deserts and whether guidelines and tools for reducing screen time and increasing activity in childcare and schools would be considered. These resources and questions will be reviewed and discussed at the next meeting.

At the previous meeting, the ACT members were asked to consider serving as ACT Team Chair/ Co-Chair. It was announced that Jackie Bavaro and Jennifer Hopkins were selected as Co-Chairs to work with NJDOH staff and ACT members to facilitate the development and implementation of the action plan to achieve the objectives.

As the meeting was called to a close, ACT members were asked to review the updated objectives, strategies, and resources and add existing resources that may be missing from the list. They were also asked to sign and submit the HNJ Membership Manual and Confidentiality Agreement, if they had not already done so.

Happy Holidays everyone!

The meeting was adjourned at 1:43pm. The next meeting is scheduled for **Wednesday, February 18, 2026, at 1:00 pm.**