Researchers engaged community members to evaluate the physical design of the space in and around their local parks. Twenty-four adults observed twenty-one parks and surrounding areas in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Participants received training on how to use the recently developed and tested Community Stakeholder Park Audit Tool (CPAT) to document their findings. Data analysis identified associations between park physical design, safety, and use of the areas for their intended purposes.

- Parks with safety concerns such as poor lighting and excessive litter within their boundaries also had more safety concerns in the areas surrounding the park.
- Parks with more areas designated for physical activity such as playgrounds, swimming pools and trails had fewer safety concerns such as evidence of threatening persons or behaviors of poor park maintenance.
- Median household income and percentage of households below the poverty line in the areas near the parks were not related to park accessibility, safety concerns in or around the park, usable physical activity areas in the park or park amenities.
- The Community Stakeholder Park Audit Tool (CPAT) was reported by participating community members as a user-friendly resource for assessing the environments of neighborhood parks.
WHAT CAN COALITIONS DO?

- **Identify key players that have overlapping interests.** Partnerships are critical for sustainability and successful community interventions. Partners who have an interest in the relationship between physical activity and substance abuse might include Parks and Rec, County/City Planning, Public Health, Social Services, Home Owners Associations, schools, hospitals, police and local businesses. Once you have partners at the table, identify areas of overlap to move the conversation forward.

- **Communicate the link between physical activity, mental health and substance use and abuse.** Substance abuse directly links to issues such as mental health, active lifestyles, physical activity, and community development. Community park design plays a central role in the promotion of healthy or unhealthy lifestyles. For example, parks are more likely to be used for healthy activities if they are free of excessive litter, drug paraphernalia, or vandalized equipment. Coalitions that inform themselves and others about these issues find it easier to work with multiple community stakeholders.

- **Empower community members to survey local park environments.** Since parks play such an important role in community health, it makes sense to include them and other public areas in your community assessments. Check to see if any community groups have already assessed these environments— if they haven’t, consider using tool such as the Community Stakeholder Park Audit Tool (CPAT) and photos. In this study, participants were asked to take pictures of things that made them either want to go to the park or never want to step foot in the park. This type of project is ideal for involving youth. Be sure to include the community in the planning, data gathering, analysis and reporting phases of assessment.

- **Spread the word!** Effective use of the media and working with local public relations firms will have a big impact on your ability to inform the community and the coalition about a range of issues and volunteer opportunities. Think about the kinds of media that are most popular in your community and work with these partners to design two-way communication plans between the community and the coalition. Public relations firms are particularly helpful for their expertise and make ‘in-kind’ partners.

Recently, we were invited to a community crime prevention program lunch and learn by our local Bay Area Apartment Association. We had previously worked with them on smoke free multi-unit housing, decreasing youth tobacco use and adult tobacco cessation. They thought this meeting would be beneficial because they understood the linkage between substance use and abuse and crime and the environment. During the meeting strengthened that connection and when we mentioned substance abuse and our work a lot of heads were nodding. They are interested in us coming to their apartment sites and talking about health and wellness and a healthy community environment. As a matter of fact, we were invited to come back and do a full presentation about the interrelationship between substance abuse and community concerns. The root of the word community is common union. This research underscores that for me because regardless of where you are living, the desire for a safe and healthy community is present and making that connection between different group’s agendas is important.