

# Go Healthy Houston

Making the Easy Choice  
the Healthy Choice



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# LETTER TO THE MAYOR

Mayor Annise Parker  
901 Bagby  
Houston, Texas 77002

Dear Mayor Parker,

The **Healthy Houston Task Force** is pleased to present you with the *Go Healthy Houston: 2012–2014 Review* which summarizes the activities of the Healthy Houston Task Force to date. The Healthy Houston Task Force was formed by Executive Order in September 2012 to promote urban agriculture; access to healthy, affordable and locally produced food; education about the risks of obesity and the benefits of consuming fresh vegetables; and programs that increase physical activity to increase health and reduce obesity.

We are pleased that the Healthy Houston Task Force has been able to contribute to these initiatives and collaborate with others to accomplish these results. We also congratulate you on being honored by the National League of Cities as the 'Most Dedicated Official' for your efforts to prevent childhood obesity and improve health of Houston residents. We look forward to a productive and successful 2015.

Sincerely,

Faith E. Foreman D.Ph., MPH, LVN  
Co-Chair  
Assistant Director, Houston Health Department  
Aging, Chronic Disease, and Injury Prevention

Lisa J. Mellencamp, J.D.  
Co-Chair





# Go Healthy Houston: 2012-2014 REVIEW

“Obesity is a significant health threat for the City of Houston and is directly associated with increased costs and lower productivity for individuals and companies.”

## Background

The **Healthy Houston Task Force** (Task Force) was formed by Executive Order No. 1-8 on September 17, 2012 to address concerns and increase community awareness related to obesity. The Executive Order acknowledged that obesity is a significant health threat for the City of Houston and is directly associated with increased costs and lower productivity for individuals and companies.

The objectives of the Task Force are to foster within local government a culture that promotes laws, programs, policies and actions that increase healthier living through the promotion of:

- access to affordable fresh and local, healthy and nutritious foods;
- awareness regarding the benefits of fresh fruits and vegetables, locally grown foods, sustainably produced foods, infant breastfeeding, the provision of healthy meals in our schools, physical activity and maintaining a healthy weight; and
- opportunities for physical activity and exercise for all ages.

Through the support of the Mayor's Office of Sustainability (MOS), the leadership provided by the Houston Health Department (HHD) and the dedication of member organizations, the Task Force has secured grant and in-kind resources to implement many quality of life improvements related to healthy eating and active living. The Task Force has also developed and adopted the name and brand **Go Healthy Houston**. The adoption of the name and brand Go Healthy Houston provides a recognizable and user-friendly name, image and message for Houstonians as they are in the community or participate in health related activities. This report outlines many of the initiatives, activities and strategic collaborations of Go Healthy Houston since its inception.





## Task Force Infrastructure Development

- **Meetings:** The Task Force meets monthly to discuss activities and opportunities. Meetings provide an opportunity for members to provide feedback, negotiate and leverage resources and learn about best practices from around the City and other areas of the country. Meetings also provide a forum for external organizations to present ideas and initiatives for the Task Force to consider for opportunities to partner and promote. Task Force meeting agendas and meeting minutes are recorded and documented by HHD staff.
- **Workgroups:** The Task Force has created workgroups to be responsible for the development of priorities and deliverables for the Task Force and to address the health of Houstonians. Workgroups include at least 1-2 Task Force members and 1-3 nonmembers that have been identified as subject matter experts or stakeholders. Workgroups meet monthly or quarterly and provide updates at the monthly Task Force meetings.
  - o **Marketing Workgroup:** The Marketing Workgroup focuses on brand and message development and promotion of the Task Force and Go Healthy Houston activities. A marketing plan has been drafted and is currently under review.
  - o **Policy Workgroup:** The Policy Workgroup focuses on vetting best and innovative practices for improving health and provides the Task Force with recommendations for activity focus or involvement.
  - o **Other Workgroups:** Other workgroups or subcommittees are created on an as needed basis to address trending topics or Task Force infrastructure needs.

Houston deserves more people-friendly streets.

Healthier and safer streets for walking and biking.  
Houstonians deserve space for physical activity.  
So the City of Houston and Go Healthy Houston are working together to create more opportunities for active living.  
Help make it happen at [www.GoHealthyHouston.org](http://www.GoHealthyHouston.org).

Adapted with permission from CLOCC/Chicago Department of Public Health. Funded by CDC.

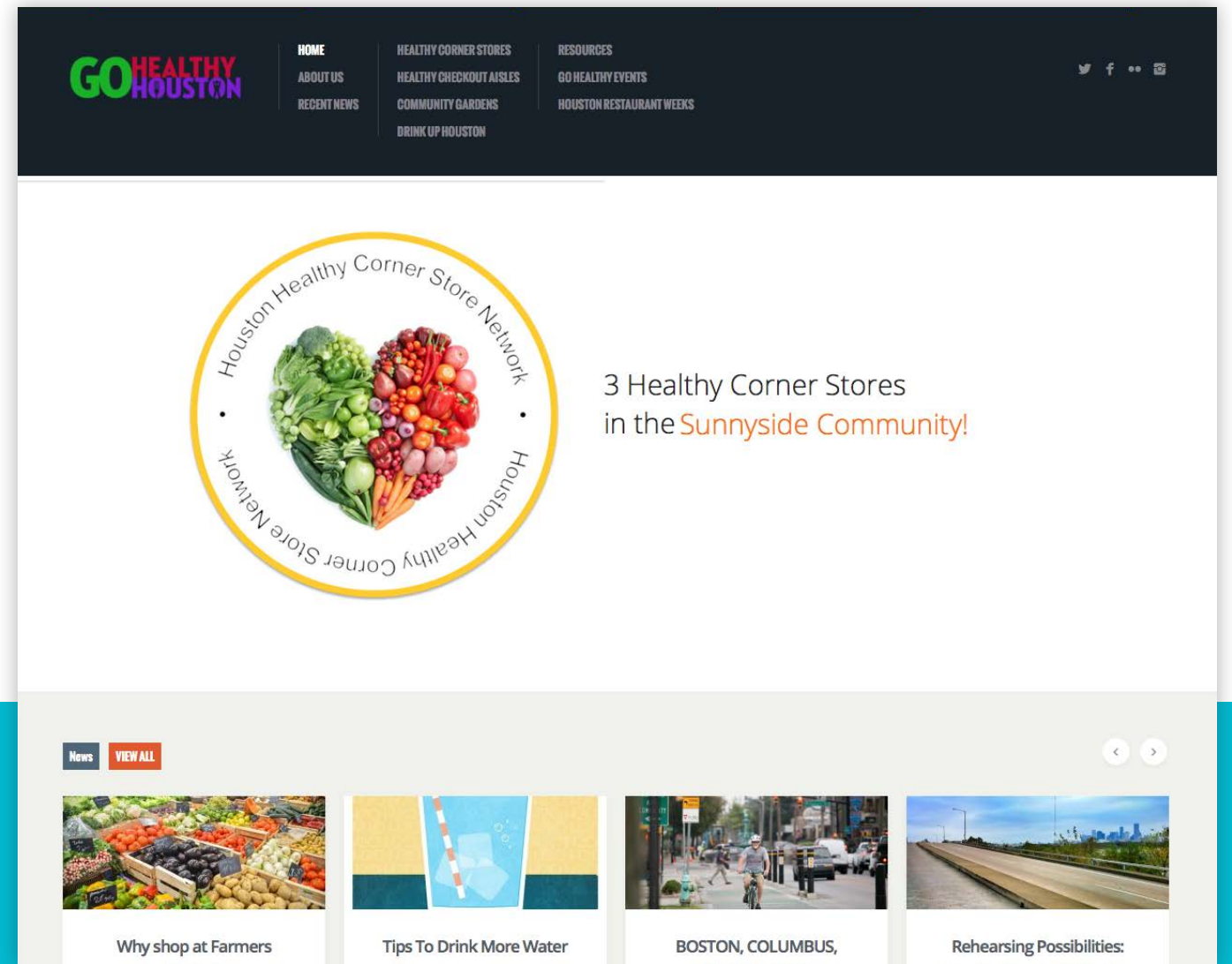





## Go Healthy Houston Branding/Marketing

- **Go Healthy Houston Logo:** The Task Force leveraged member resources to develop the 'Go Healthy Houston' logo shown below. The purpose of the logo is to create brand recognition and credibility for health related activities and initiatives sponsored by the Task Force and its membership; the logo serves as an umbrella or co-brand for partner organizations. Logos help the general public to identify initiatives and messages.
- **Go Healthy Houston Tagline:** The words 'Go Healthy Houston' serves both as a brand and as a tagline for the initiative. Additionally, the tagline 'Making the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice' may be included with Go Healthy Houston initiatives.
- **Go Healthy Houston Website:** The Task Force, through HHD and Task Force member organization Recipe for Success, has created a website to provide accessible information to the community about urban agriculture initiatives, where to access healthy, affordable and local food, where to access green spaces and about ways to be physically active in the City. [www.gohealthyhouston.org](http://www.gohealthyhouston.org)
- **Go Healthy Houston Social Media:** The Task Force has created social media accounts including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Social media provides a channel for disseminating literature and best practices related to the promotion of healthy eating and active living, direct consumer education and promotion of activities and opportunities within the City.

“Making the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice.”







## Go Healthy Houston Initiatives

To achieve the objectives of the Task Force, Go Healthy Houston has led or been involved in the initiatives described in the following paragraphs, categorized by focus area.

**Urban Agriculture:** The Task Force supports and promotes laws, programs, policies and actions that increase urban agriculture.

- The **HHD Community Nutrition** initiatives support urban gardens and markets that inspire and empower people of diverse backgrounds to grow, eat and buy local and organic food. The initiative improves health and nutrition, creates community and supports valuable local businesses that together sustain and improve the environment. HHD has prioritized increasing enrollment in and utilization of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and invested in outreach efforts.
  - **The Get Moving Houston Farmers Market** program provides access to fresh fruits and vegetables in communities identified as food deserts. The program is facilitated by HHD and hosted at their Multi-Service Centers. The program works to provide high quality produce at a low or reasonable cost and accepts payments via WIC vouchers and electronic benefits transfers (EBT).
  - There are currently 11 **HHD Community Gardens** located at HHD Multi-Service centers and other City locations. A Master Gardener coordinates volunteers, provides garden maintenance and garden/nutrition education classes for community residents.

- By collaborating with Houston Green Office Challenge participants, the City has planted numerous **vegetable gardens** in downtown Houston. The City has also encouraged the sale and purchase of local food by supporting a **weekly farmers market** at City Hall, with over 40 vendors.
- The City launched **Urban Grows** in October 2013. The City now provides the use of City land for urban agriculture and neighborhood and school allotment gardens. The first 2 allotment gardens using this new model were built in the Sunnyside neighborhood in collaboration with Task Force member organization, UrbanHarvest. The Task Force is currently compiling and developing recommendations and guidelines to create a standardized process for interested parties to access the Urban Grows program which will make City vacant lots more accessible by community groups for local food crop production.
- In January 2014 the City was selected as a participant in the **2014 GRO1000 Gardens and Green Spaces Grant Awards Program**. The City's grant will help build a Garden and Nature Playground at the Gabriela Mistral Center for Early Childhood in the Gulfton area featuring an urban garden and an outdoor classroom.

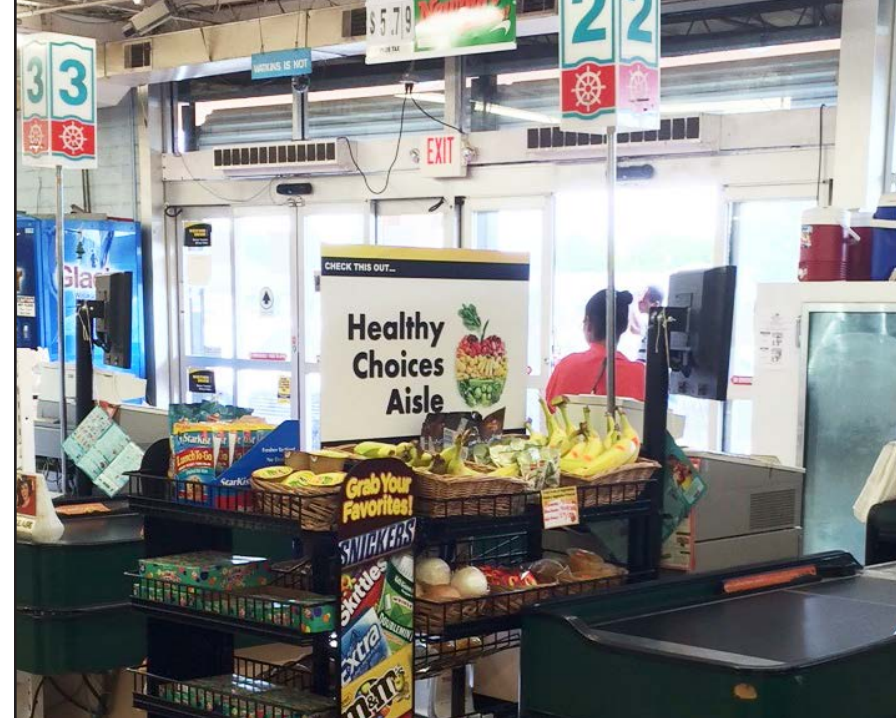


**Access to Healthy, Affordable and Locally Produced Food:** The Task Force supports and promotes laws, programs, policies and actions that increase access to healthy, affordable, and locally produced foods for all Houstonians.

- Using the recommendations of the Houston Grocery Access Task Force, the City has identified target food desert areas for the **development of a fresh food financing initiative** to encourage new supermarkets and grocery stores and worked to develop a business financing program that can support such development. Pyburns, the first store financed through this initiative, will be in South East Houston; the ground breaking was in July 2014.
- In July 2014, HHD partnered with Task Force member organization, CAN DO Houston to launch a pilot **Go Healthy Corner Store Initiative** which supports selling fruits and vegetables and healthier snack options in corner and/or convenience stores and includes training on healthy product procurement, product placement and infrastructure support. The corner store initiative is an example of working with existing resources to improve access to healthier foods within low-income, food desert communities.
- In August 2014, HHD partnered with Task Force member organization, CAN DO Houston to launch a pilot **Go Healthy Houston, Healthy Checkout**

**Aisle Initiative** working with a local grocer to place healthy food at certain checkout aisles and to eliminate candy and sugared sweetened beverages at these aisles. Healthy Checkout Aisles help consumers by providing point-of-decision prompts that encourage healthy snacking options. This initiative may be replicated and expanded to other stores and geographic areas. One checkout aisle has the potential to reach approximately 11,000 residents.

- In August 2014, the Task Force partnered with **Houston Restaurant Weeks** to identify restaurants that have healthy menu options. Those restaurants that met the healthy criteria were labeled as Go Healthy Houston restaurants with point of decision prompts identifying the healthy menu options. This partnership provides the public with nutrition education and exposes Houstonians to the Go Healthy Houston brand and message. Over 4,000,000 unique visitors viewed the Houston Restaurant Weeks website during a 6 week period.
- In 2013, the Task Force partnered with **Brighter Bites**, a partner program of the Houston Food Bank, to strategically channel donated produce from the Food Bank into communities that are located in food desert areas and promote food literacy. The program provides 30 pounds per week of fresh fruits and vegetables at a cost of \$3.00



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per week for each participating family, combined with nutrition education, over 16 weeks during the school year. The program targets schools with greater than 90% of the children receiving free or reduced lunches. In the 2013-2014 school year, Go Healthy Houston assisted in procuring seed funding from the American Beverage Association for the program successfully implemented in Blackshear elementary reaching over 100 families and expanded into 11 schools and YMCAs serving over 1,770 families. Brighter Bites continues to expand with locations in Houston and Dallas, serving more than 30 schools and after school sites and is anticipated to reach at least 3,000 families in the 2014-2015 school year.

- A full scale **Go Healthy Houston Designation Program** that identifies healthy food retail outlets, businesses and other organizations in the community is currently under development. The expected launch is 2015.
- The Task Force is working to include **healthy vending language** in the contracting process for the supply of beverages in vending machines accessible to City employees to reduce the availability

of sodas and sugar-sweetened beverages and unhealthy snacks. City-wide a 50% healthy vending requirement will be adopted, with a 100% healthy vending requirement at all health related buildings. All beverage machines, at all locations in the City, will be branded to market low or no calorie beverage options. This policy will impact all City employees and visitors to City facilities.

- The Task Force partnered with member organization, Recipe for Success in its annual **VegOut! Challenge** multi-media campaign to engage over 7,500 Houstonians in the past 2 years to increase their vegetable intake, providing them with recipes and resources, including participation of 17 Houston area HEBs and 5 Whole Foods Markets promoting fresh produce and 25 restaurants featuring vegetarian menu options. The City and other area workplaces have incorporated the annual challenge into their wellness efforts.
- The National League of Cities honored Mayor Annise Parker with the **'Most Dedicated Official'** award for her efforts to prevent childhood obesity and improve the health of Houston residents.





**Green Space and Programs that Increase Physical Activity:**

The Task Force supports and promotes laws, programs, policies and actions that increase green space and opportunities for physical activity and active living.

- In November 2012, City voters passed a bond referendum for the **Bayou Greenways Initiative**. Over the next 10 years, the Bayou Greenways will add 4,000 acres of new and equitably distributed green spaces that can also serve the function of flood control and storm water quality enhancement. It will also complete 300 miles of continuous all-weather hike and bike trails that will meander through those greenways — an amenity unparalleled in the nation. Developing green corridors along the bayous with connected trails bring a smart and sustainable resolution to alleviate the City's green space and flooding challenges.
- In April 2013, the City expanded **Houston Bike Share** to encourage biking in Houston. Biking will encourage health and environmental change, as well as be part of the community's transportation

network. Houston now has over 250 bikes and 29 kiosks throughout downtown and adjacent neighborhoods (Montrose, Midtown, East End and the Museum District). The most recent bike share kiosk was placed, in cooperation with the Houston Housing Authority, at Clayton Homes. Phase III expansion plans include bike share kiosks at the City's universities, the Texas Medical Center and additional neighborhoods.

- The City passed a **Safe Passage** ordinance to keep bicyclists and pedestrians safer on City streets and encourage more outdoor activity. HHD and MOS developed Safe Passage bumper stickers to be placed on City fleet vehicles to educate the public on the law.
- In October 2013, the City launched a transformative new approach for Houston streets that will accommodate the needs of all users, not just those behind the wheel. The **Complete Streets and Transportation Plan** is meant to provide safe, accessible and convenient use by motorists, public transit riders, pedestrians, people of all abilities

and bicyclists. The ultimate goal, where appropriate, is walkable and bike-friendly neighborhoods with amenities such as trees and landscaping, public art and street furniture.

- In October 2013, the City also unveiled Texas' first certified **GreenRoads** projects in Midtown (Bagby Street) which blends low impact development techniques and environmentally-friendly elements into a sustainable roadway construction project, balancing the need for automobile circulation with a pedestrian oriented mixed-use environment.
- The City helped pass a law, working with the utility CenterPoint, to allow **hike and bike trails along utility rights of way**. The rights of way provide a clear path of open space in Houston's urban setting, and new trails will help create a complete network of off-street bicycle paths for the City.
- The City is working cooperatively with the organizers of Critical Mass and the Houston Police Department to ensure the City's growing and increasingly popular **Critical Mass** monthly bike ride is safe and successful.

- In September 2013, the City was awarded **Scenic City Certification** validating the work done to **strengthen the City's ordinances and invest in public spaces and infrastructure**. The City presented its existing standards for assessment and scored those standards against model standards for design and development of public roadways and public spaces.

- The City has joined with the Buffalo Bayou Partnership to fund maintenance and operations of the comprehensive 160-acre **Buffalo Bayou Park enhancements** which began in July 2012.
- Three pilot open streets events, **Sunday Streets HTX**, were held in April, May and June 2014. A section of a major street was closed to motorized vehicles, opening them for physical activity and social interactions for pedestrians and cyclists. Following the successful spring pilot, 3 more events were hosted in October, November and December 2014. Due to overwhelming popularity, the City of Houston now partners with Cigna to host **Cigna Sunday Streets**, 6 times per





year. Approximately 20,000 Houstonians participate in each event.

**City, State and National Programs Promoting Healthy Eating and Active Living:**

As part of its efforts to educate the community about the risks of obesity and the benefits of healthy eating, the Task Force participates in or collaborates with city, state and national initiatives that either directly promote healthy eating and active living or encourage the fostering of cultures that support policies, programs and projects that promote healthy eating and active living.

- In January 2014, the City in conjunction with HEB, Southwestern Energy and the YMCA of Greater Houston, launched the **Million Pound Challenge** to help fight the obesity epidemic and “**Shape Up Houston**”, a campaign to recruit community members to lose 1,000,000 pounds. This is a program that directly targets individuals to make healthy food choices related to weight loss.
- Houston has become a **Let's Move City** and has been awarded a bronze medal in Goal 3 for citywide improvements in providing healthy food in schools by increasing participation in the School Breakfast Program (SBP) and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).
- Houston has been designated as a Gold Medal city in the **Texas Healthy Communities Designation Program** coordinated by the Texas Department of Health and Human Services. This award is based on indicators related to stroke and cardiovascular disease prevention.

**Other Initiatives including Tobacco-Free Living and Environmental Policy:**

The Task Force membership is such that it is able to focus on other health-related projects beyond obesity prevention strategies. The Task Force has specifically lent expertise and branding to smoke-free policy initiatives and environmental policy.

- The Task Force has worked with HHD and the Houston Housing Authority to institute a **smoke-free policy** at the agency's **25 multi-unit public housing facilities** in the City. This policy will provide over 16,000 residents with a smoke-free living environment.
- The Task Force worked with HHD and the Houston Department of Parks and Recreation and the Houston Libraries to develop and adopt **smoke-free policies for all City parks and recreation facilities and library campuses** thus decreasing exposure to second hand smoke for all Houstonians. The potential reach of this policy is over 2,000,000 residents.
- HHD and the Task Force worked with task force member organization, MD Anderson Cancer Center to develop a **resource of best practices and guidelines for adopting smoke and/or tobacco-free policies at colleges and universities**. Currently, the University of Houston and Rice are in the process of adopting smoke-free campus policies.
- The City has committed to **reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions** by another 10 percent by, among other things, continuing energy efficiency retrofits and LEED certification in municipal buildings, expanding hybrid, electric and CNG powered vehicles and Houston FleetShare, a motor pool system for City employees, and expanding recycling and utilizing innovative technologies to increase waste diversion.
- In March 2013, the City was selected as winner of a \$1,000,000 innovation prize in the Bloomberg Philanthropies Mayors Challenge to help implement its **One Bin for All** idea to achieve high-volume recycling and waste diversion.

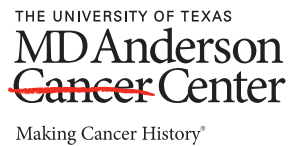




Go Healthy Houston has had a very successful 2 years. Through the leadership of the Mayor's Office of Sustainability and the HHD, the Task Force has been able to create a credible brand and has been involved in policy level strategies that address obesity at a City-wide level. The majority of funding and resources have come through grant dollars or in-kind resources provided by member organizations. Primary grants have included the HHD Community Transformation Grant and the HHD REACH (Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health) Grant. These grants focused on chronic disease prevention strategies that were evidenced-based and with the potential to impact entire communities, neighborhoods or the City as a whole.

The Task Force is currently developing a Healthy Eating, Active Living Strategic Plan to improve the health of all Houstonians by implementing or supporting initiatives that make the healthy choice the easy choice.

Go Healthy Houston is possible with the help from the following partners:



- Houston Food Bank
- University of Texas School of Public Health
- Houston Independent School District