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The Health City Movement in China: A People-Centered Approach

Background: The health city project (HCP) in China contains four core items: environment improvement, health promotion, food safety and drinking-water, and communicable diseases control. Until now, it has been developed for 24 years and a total of 153 cities have been named as health city. The purpose of this research was to explore the impacts of HCP.

Methods: Retrospective cohort study design was adopted in this research. Data were collected from 15 health cities and 15 corresponding control cities, ranging from the 5th year before health cities being named to 2012. 16 residents and 12 key-informants in each health city were interviewed using semi-structured interviews in December 2013. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and qualitative data were analyzed manually according to pre-defined themes.

Results: Most health cities have greatly improved its environment and infrastructure, particularly garbage and sewage disposal, greening space, road condition and Agri-product market. Urban residents' health literacy was tremendously increased, blood and sexually transmitted communicable diseases and vector-borne diseases were decreased to or maintained at a relatively low level. Awareness of environment-health links was raised across residents and stakeholders. Inter-sectoral collaboration and cities' capacity of governance was remarkably strengthened. Many health cities also announced several municipal policies to maintain the achievements.

Discussion: Health is determined by health environment, which means that health issues are beyond health system. Because improving health environment needs other sectors' participation, or even the public's. HCP in China mobilized considerable resources to improve urban residents' working and living conditions, achieved effective intersectoral collaboration and promoted communities' involvement. What's more, many health cities have put health issues onto urban agendas. The findings would contribute to better understanding health promotion and health in all policies, and could also provide valuable experience for other developing countries.