

**cities
for better
health**



WORKSHOP REPORT

Partner forum report

COPENHAGEN 2025

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“As Cities for Better Health has grown, **we’ve welcomed new cities and partners and built a stronger, more connected network.** The focus now is to build on that foundation – working together, aligning our capabilities and strengthening our shared commitment to achieve even greater impact.”

Jo Jewell, Director, Cities for Better Health

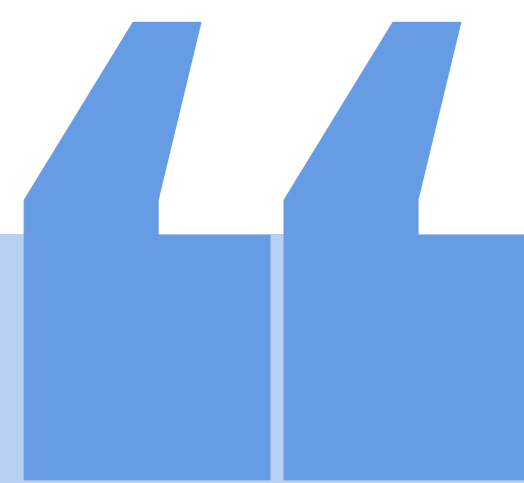
About the Cities for Better Health partner forum

This report highlights key insights from the Cities for Better Health partner forum held on 29 October 2025 in Copenhagen. The forum brought together more than 45 participants from 25 organisations, including research partners, NGOs and the private sector, to explore how public-private partnerships can accelerate impactful primary prevention in cities.

The Cities for Better Health partner forum was convened to strengthen relationships across the network, consult partners and key stakeholders on the programme’s strategy and way of working and create space for meaningful collaboration. Through interactive workshops and dialogue, participants reflected on shared priorities, identified opportunities for expanded collaboration and discussed how to strengthen Cities for Better Health initiatives to scale impact.

The Cities for Better Health partner forum showcased the value of partnership in translating global ambition into local action – reaffirming a shared commitment to healthier, more equitable and more sustainable cities.

Heard around the room



“Cities for Better Health stands out because of its clear focus, knowing what we want to achieve and why. Cities are changing fast, and urban planning can’t always keep pace. That creates a gap in opportunities for children and young people to be active, and this is where **Cities for Better Health can make a real difference.**”



“Cities for Better Health has a great opportunity to help sustain action over time by deepening engagement with city governments. Finding **the right level of collaboration can unlock ever greater impact** and ensure that change is sustainably embedded within local systems.”



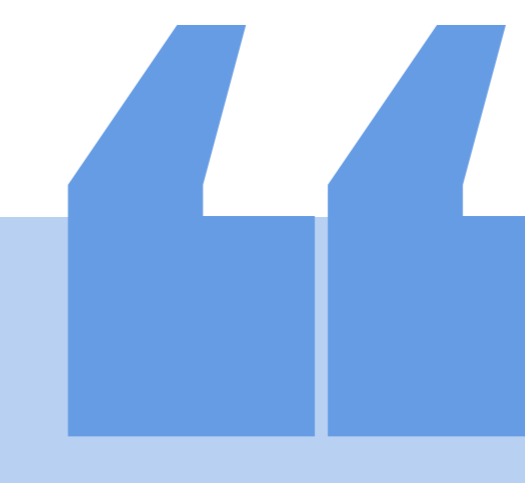
“Every Cities for Better Health initiative I hear about makes me think **how much potential there is to work together** and learn from each other’s geography, methodology and approach.”



“What makes Cities for Better Health impactful is its combined focus on healthy food and physical activity. Looking at both together creates **a more holistic approach to prevention** – one that reflects how people actually live in cities.”



“There’s **a real opportunity to go beyond the numbers** in the report and use the insights we’ve gathered and the strength of this global partner network to **drive advocacy and action.**”



“Cities for Better Health is building **a community with a shared mission.** By facilitating knowledge sharing and connection across sectors, we can **strengthen the programme, support our partners and deepen our collective understanding** of what it takes to create healthier, more equitable cities.”

[WHAT WE HEARD](#)

Shared ambitions

Aligning strategy with shared goals

Participating organisations reflected on the Cities for Better Health strategy and how it connects with their goals and work in urban communities. They welcomed the focus on equity, prevention and place-based action, recognising cities as practical and scalable settings for change. *“Increasing opportunities for health in public spaces puts responsibility where it belongs – on city systems rather than individuals.”*

While the dual focus on healthy food and physical activity was recognised as a strong foundation, participants noted that a truly holistic approach should also address broader determinants such as transport, climate and urban design. They called for clearer criteria for selecting cities, including population, inequity and local health challenges. Participants highlighted the need for stronger links between local initiatives and system-level policies to ensure sustainable impact.

Many emphasised that a shared theory of change and a structured onboarding process would align priorities from the start. *“We need a clear theory of change that shows how action in one neighbourhood can lead to long-term, structural impact.”*

Using evidence to guide action

Monitoring and evaluation featured prominently in the discussion. Participants valued the programme’s commitment to impact evaluation. They called for standardised data collection to ensure comparability and emphasised continuing the shift from short-term outputs to track system and policy change.

Several recommended using a small set of shared indicators and one universal key performance indicator (KPI) to show environmental and systemic shifts. *“If prevention is the ambition, measures must capture more than individual behaviour – they should show how environments are changing.”*

Connecting experience and learning

Participants reaffirmed the importance of knowledge sharing across the network and closer collaboration between implementation, evidence and policy. *“We need to share the how, not just the what.”*

Stronger links between cities, communities and local governments were seen as essential, along with more structured exchanges, practical tools and clearer ways to share lessons.

KEY INSIGHTS

Clarity and focus create alignment

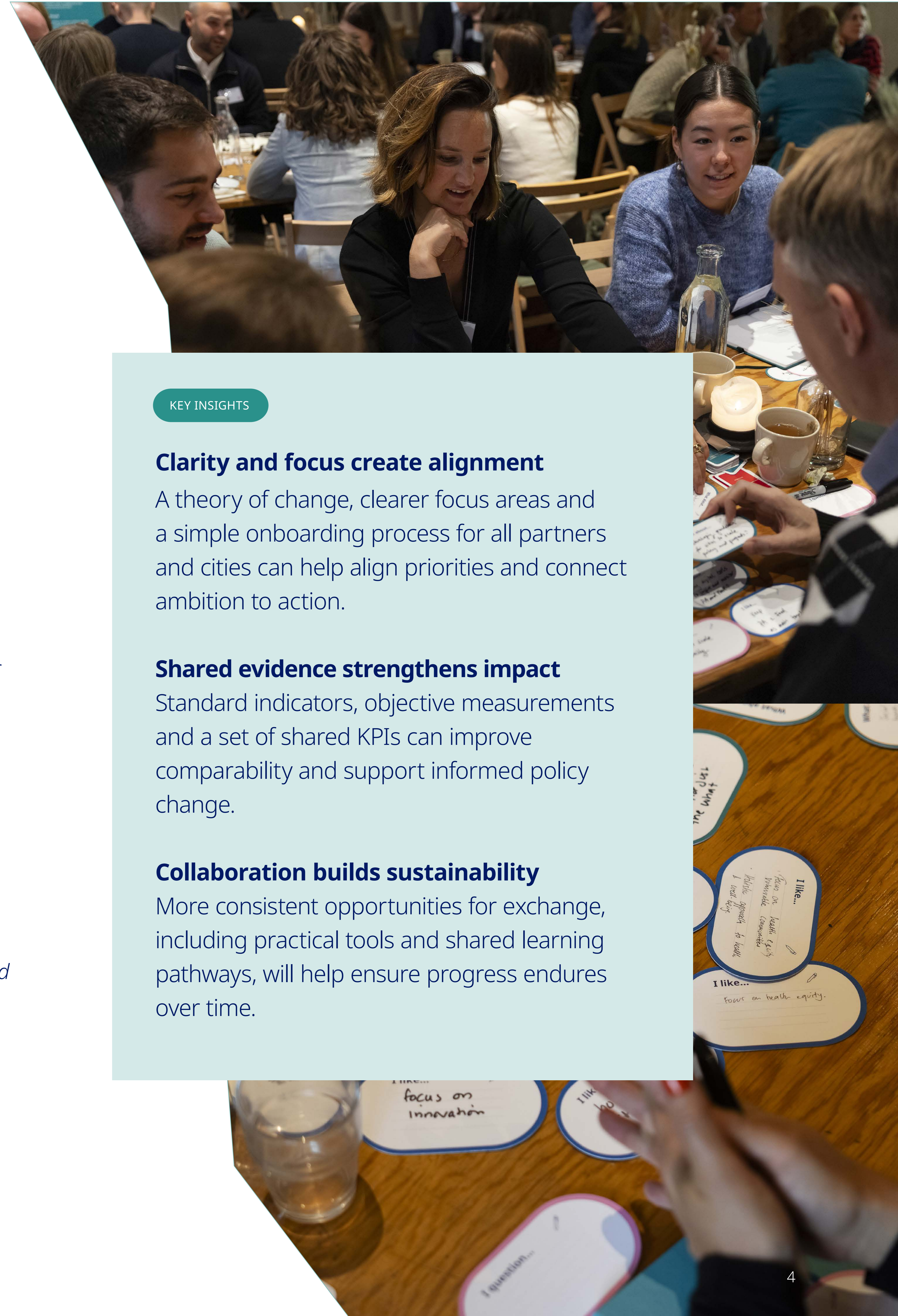
A theory of change, clearer focus areas and a simple onboarding process for all partners and cities can help align priorities and connect ambition to action.

Shared evidence strengthens impact

Standard indicators, objective measurements and a set of shared KPIs can improve comparability and support informed policy change.

Collaboration builds sustainability

More consistent opportunities for exchange, including practical tools and shared learning pathways, will help ensure progress endures over time.



[WHAT WE HEARD](#)

From ambition to action

Building on shared ambition

Participants reflected on how their organisational value drivers connect to Cities for Better Health and where collaboration has delivered tangible progress. They highlighted that the programme provides a credible platform for translating ambition into local impact and serves as a driver for scaling pilot projects into city-wide interventions that strengthen well-being.

Several stressed the need for guidance from Cities for Better Health on mutual expectations for the level of engagement, resource commitments and co-funding. They noted that clear roles and responsibilities for both Cities for Better Health and partners would strengthen ownership of the programme's ambition and impact.

Participants agreed that the programme supports alignment around prevention and equity, while fostering joint action across health, environmental and policy agendas. *"Working together through Cities for Better Health helps us deliver real change where people live."*

Knowledge and research opportunities

Participants recognised Cities for Better Health as a platform for generating evidence and learning. They

valued testing approaches in real-world settings, evaluating outcomes and using the data to strengthen interventions and advocacy. *"Cities for Better Health lets us take what works locally and prove its value globally."*

Many emphasised the importance of integrating diverse expertise – from behavioural science and active mobility to nutrition and equity – to understand what drives lasting change. Strong monitoring and evaluation were considered vital to achieving continuous improvement and scaling effective models.

Expanding networks and influence

The programme connects partner organisations across sectors and geographies, enabling collaboration that few could achieve alone. Participants valued the visibility and credibility that the network provides. *"The partnerships built through Cities for Better Health give our work more reach and legitimacy."*

To strengthen collaboration, partners recommended developing more structured avenues for exchange, such as an online collaboration forum, regional learning groups and a catalogue of partner capabilities to support joint planning and peer-to-peer problem-solving.

KEY INSIGHTS

Aligned expectations strengthen long-term commitment

Clear guidance on partner roles, city engagement and resource contributions helps sustain action by ensuring accountability and shared ownership of outcomes.

Real-world learning strengthens models for impact

Piloting prevention approaches in diverse settings and integrating cross-sector expertise helps refine interventions and generate evidence to scale.

Structured collaboration amplifies reach and influence

Deliberate opportunities for exchange, such as online forums and a partner capability catalogue, can support coordinated action and strengthen the programme's collective impact.

Partnerships in practice

Walk and talk at Spor10

Following the morning sessions, participants joined a guided walk to Spor10, a Cities for Better Health partner and community hub in Copenhagen. Located in a former railway workshop, Spor10 has been transformed into a vibrant, people-centred space through collaboration between local organisations, city planners and creative initiatives. The facility caters to all ages, offering creative classes, sports associations, healthy community dinners and more to the neighbourhood, and is piloting Civic Dollars, an app-based incentive that rewards residents for being active outdoors.

The visit highlighted how place-based partnerships can turn urban regeneration into a catalyst for health and inclusion. Through shared spaces and community-led design, co-creation can foster connection, inclusion and well-being.



“Partnerships are key because they bring knowledge, networks and ideas together. Through Spor10, we’ve connected with Cities for Better Health partners like Steno and Civic Dollars, combining strengths and showing how **collaboration can turn shared goals into better community health** for everyone.”

Shaping the future together

Driving system-level transformation

Participants looked ahead to how Cities for Better Health can expand its reach and deepen its impact. They emphasised the importance of prioritising fewer, more integrated initiatives that can demonstrate system-wide benefits. Participants highlighted the value of targeting city policy and planning processes to embed prevention across food, transport and climate agendas. Some also stressed the need to tie local action to national or regional systems to help city-level work inform broader policy and investment decisions.

Participants also called for early sustainability planning, so that initiatives can be implemented and scaled over the long term. This includes defining where and how to take action, aligning projects with municipal strategies and building on existing government structures to strengthen ownership. *"We need to connect what happens in cities to the systems that shape them."*

Targeting everyday settings for impact

Participants agreed that the greatest potential for change lies in the everyday environments that shape how people live, such as schools, neighbourhoods and

shared public spaces. They underlined the value of co-creation with local governments and communities, encouraging the programme to support cities with practical planning tools and best practice examples to strengthen local delivery.

Measuring what matters

Many agreed that success must reflect both system-level change and individual outcomes. They highlighted the importance of measuring social, environmental and policy shifts through indicators such as levels of social connection, policy integration and improvements in urban design.

Participants also stressed the need to combine quantitative data with qualitative insights to show not only what changes, but how and why change happens. They encouraged Cities for Better Health to provide clearer guidance on how to assess these broader system-level shifts and qualitative insights. *"We need to measure how systems evolve – not just how many people are reached, but how cities themselves change as a result."*

KEY INSIGHTS

System-level focus drives lasting change

Focusing on fewer initiatives that align with municipal strategies and are supported by early sustainability planning and defined roles helps embed prevention within city systems.

Partnerships to create healthier environments

Co-creating solutions with local governments and communities, supported by practical tools and templates, can help turn public spaces into healthier, more inclusive environments.

Measuring change builds understanding

Combining quantitative and qualitative data with clear guidance on measuring environmental, social and system-level shifts supports cities in tracking meaningful long-term progress.



Strengthening the path forward

Driving measurable health impact

The final session invited participating organisations to reflect on a central question: *How do we strengthen Cities for Better Health together?* The discussion focused on how the programme can continue to build collective impact while moving from short-term projects to a more long-term, cohesive approach.

Robust monitoring and evaluation were seen as essential for tracking progress and demonstrating value. Participants emphasised the importance of developing a more unified approach to learning and evidence, noting that a shared framework would help cities and partners understand how to define progress. They agreed that data should guide learning, communication and advocacy, helping to show not just what works, but why.

Embedding sustainability from the start

Participants highlighted the need to embed sustainability into project planning from the outset, noting that long-term change requires clear intentions from the start.

They recommended early alignment on priorities and outcomes to ensure all partners understand what lasting impact should look like.

Several participants emphasised the value of focusing on fewer, more in-depth interventions to build evidence and replicable models. *"Intentionality from the start, that's what makes change last."*

Strengthening collaboration and visibility

A more connected and visible network was seen as key to the next phase of Cities for Better Health. Participants proposed structured opportunities for collaboration, knowledge exchange and shared reflection.

Improving communication and strengthening the Cities for Better Health identity were also seen as priorities to build momentum. Shared storytelling and joint participation in global events were discussed as opportunities to increase visibility and position the programme as a leading voice in shaping healthier, more equitable cities.

KEY INSIGHTS

A clear learning system accelerates progress

A unified approach to learning and reflection helps partners understand what is working across cities and strengthens their actions.

Intentional planning builds sustainability

Early agreement on priorities, outcomes and level of engagement ensures interventions are designed for long-term impact and scaling.

Collaboration and visibility amplify influence

Consistent opportunities for exchange, shared storytelling and joint visibility can raise the profile of Cities for Better Health as a trusted voice in urban health.



Participating organisations



Cities for Better Health initiatives



Cycle for Better Health

Cycle for Better Health is a global initiative between BYCS and Cities for Better Health, empowering children to embrace cycling as part of daily life. Piloted in Bogotá, Bratislava and Bari, the initiative helps children in underserved communities to be healthier and more active through cycling.

The programme focuses on addressing the individual barriers that prevent children from cycling, and equips them with the skills, confidence and motivation to cycle safely in their local environments.

→ [Learn more](#)



Healthy Cycling Challenge

Each year, Cities for Better Health runs an innovation challenge to spotlight community-led ideas that make neighbourhoods healthier and more inclusive. In 2025, the challenge focused on cycling, in partnership with the European Cyclists' Federation (ECF).

The three Healthy Cycling Challenge winners are local innovators transforming cycling into a force for health, equity and sustainability across cities in Peru, São Paulo and Nepal.

→ [Learn more](#)



Football for Better Health

The partnership between Instituto Nossa Arena and Cities for Better Health combines football training with mentorship to break down barriers and foster healthier lifestyles, stronger communities and greater gender equity in São Paulo.

The initiative has trained 40 leaders from 20 grassroots organisations, with seven of the organisations receiving grants to deliver weekly football sessions for more than 650 girls in the community.

→ [Learn more](#)



Thriving Foodscapes

Thriving Foodscapes, developed by Cities for Better Health and Gehl, helps cities design healthier food environments through urban planning and design. The initiative supports local governments in integrating access to healthy, sustainable food into neighbourhood design to make the healthy choice the easy choice.

Pilots in cities across Europe and Latin America demonstrate how planning can shape healthier, more equitable urban food systems.

→ [Learn more](#)



Move for Fun

A partnership between the International Sport and Culture Association (ISCA) and Cities for Better Health, Move for Fun helps children in underserved communities rediscover the joy of being active through weekly play and movement sessions.

Piloted with over 2,000 children in Poland, Argentina and the UK, the initiative now aims to reach 20,000 children across the Cities for Better Health network, making physical activity more joyful, inclusive and accessible.

→ [Learn more](#)



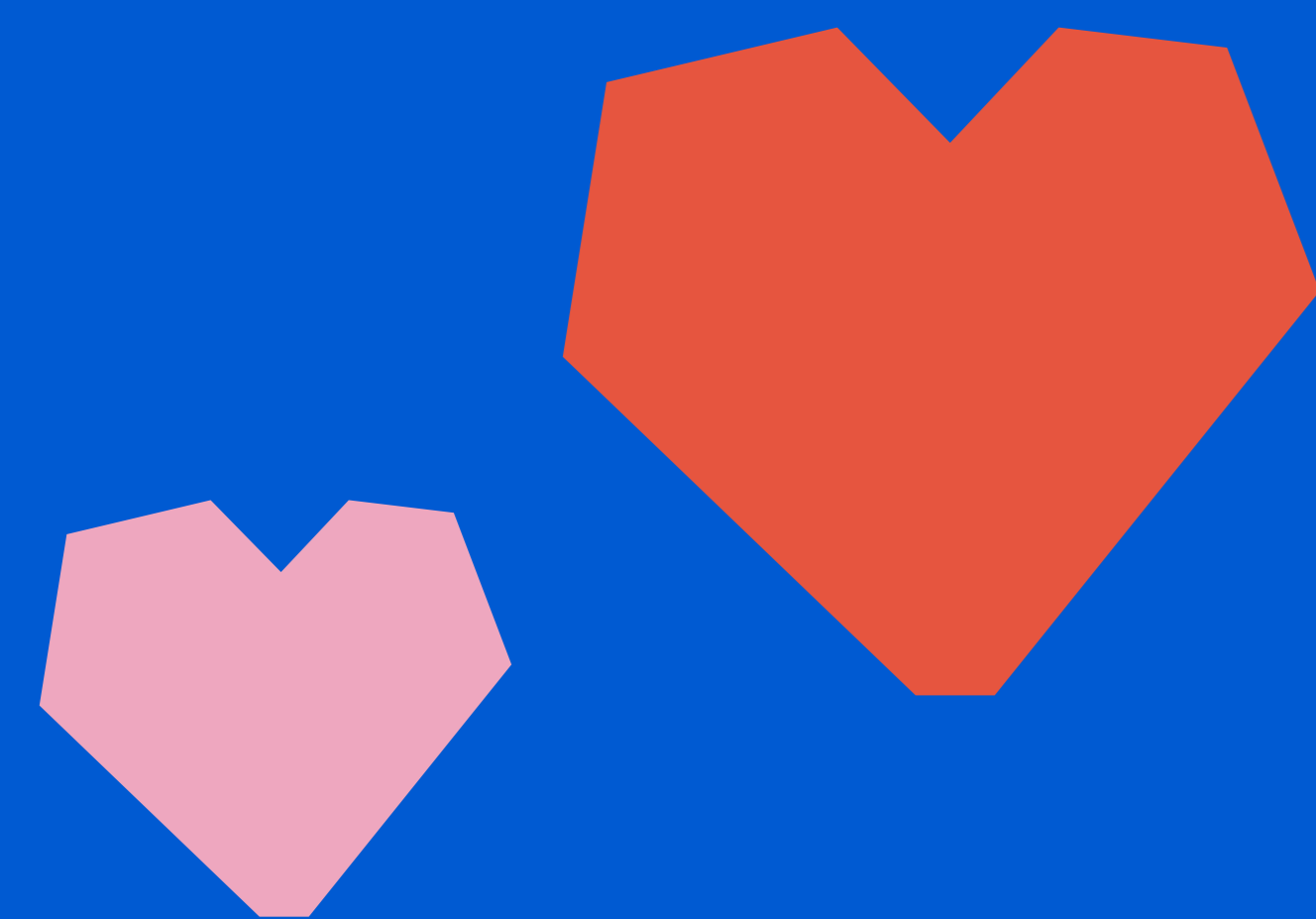
Childhood Obesity Prevention Initiative (COPI)

Part of the Cities for Better Health programme, COPI aims to improve the health and well-being of school-aged children from disadvantaged urban communities in five cities across Brazil, Canada, Japan, South Africa and Spain.

Over three years, local coalitions will co-design, implement and evaluate interventions that improve diet and physical activity, supported by global partners Novo Nordisk, Delivery Associates and the Behavioural Insights Team.

→ [Learn more](#)

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