

Promoting Active Communities

Many communities in Minnesota are now working to promote Active Communities policies to provide safe and convenient opportunities for physical activity. Active Communities integrates physical activity into daily routines such as walking or biking for transportation or recreation, playing in the park, working in the yard or using recreation facilities. Active Communities policies and practices in community design, land use and facility access have been proven effective to increase levels of physical activity.

Physical environment and activity levels

The built environment has a strong effect on whether or not members of a community walk or bike.¹

- Many Americans live in places where it's not easy to get the recommended amounts of physical activity everyday.²
- People tend to walk and bike where they have pleasant and safe places to do so.



Sidewalks, bike paths, and crosswalks, as well as trees, adequate safe lighting, benches, water fountains and trash removal can make a difference.³

- Benefits of regular physical activity include: lower the risk of developing heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes; cuts risk of falling and bone fractures; helps manage discomfort of arthritis; helps develop and maintain strong bones, muscles, and joints; improves mood and sense of well-being; and helps control weight.²

What Active Communities look like

- Sidewalks, walking and biking paths, and bike lanes
- Safe and convenient pedestrian street crossing features such as crosswalks, stop signs, stop lights and other street crossing elements

- Motorist traffic calming and speed-reduction measures
- Street landscaping and pedestrian-level street lighting
- Bike racks, lockers, or other bike parking and storage facilities
- Increased access to existing community facilities (school gyms and tracks on evenings and weekends, extended hours at recreational facilities, adequate parking at parks and trailheads)⁴
- Land use development patterns to locate homes, worksites, schools, stores and other community services and amenities within reasonable walking distances (pedestrian-oriented development) and within easy access to transit (transit-oriented development)

Active living policies and practices in community design, land use and facility access have been proven effective to increase levels of physical activity.

Active Communities and MDH

The Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) supports community health boards and tribal governments in their health improvement efforts in school, worksite, community, and health care settings. As part of SHIP, many local programs are currently working to promote Active Communities. Expected outcomes are to:

- Increase opportunities for non-motorized transportation to residents.
- Increase access to community recreational facilities for residents.
- Increase physical activity among community residents.

Minnesota Physical Activity e-news (MN PA e-news)

is a free statewide information network open to individuals and organizations interested in physical activity. MN PA e-news includes physical activity information on grants, resources, programs, conferences and more. To subscribe: email health.activeliving@state.mn.us or visit www.health.state.mn.us/physicalactivity.

For more information and to get involved:

<http://www.health.state.mn.us/healthreform/ship>

<http://www.health.state.mn.us/mnpan>

References

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2. Partnership for Prevention. (2001). *Creating Communities for Active Aging*. Partnership for Prevention. http://www.prevent.org/images/stories/Files/publications/Active_Aging.pdf
3. Public Health Law and Policy. *Complete Streets Talking Points*. Planning for Healthy Places. <http://www.phlpnet.org/healthy-planning/products/complete-streets-talking-points>
4. Kahn EB, Ramsey LT, Brownson R, et al. The effectiveness of interventions to increase physical activity: a systematic review. *Am J Prev Med* 2002;22(4S):73-107

