

23-01

STATEMENT OF POLICY

Physical Activity

Policy

NACCHO supports local health department leadership in encouraging opportunities for physical activity including the enhancement of the built environment in local communities to help meet recommended Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. Physical activity policies and organizational practices must seek to increase physical activity through creating environments in which people have equitable access to safe spaces and programs that assist with adopting healthy habits into daily routines. NACCHO encourages local health departments to support legislation, best-practices, and policy efforts to do any of the following:

Link Physical Activity to Chronic Disease Programs at the Health Department and in the Community

1. Increase the effectiveness of chronic disease prevention and management programs by incorporating physical activity training and promotion strategies.
2. Encourage local health departments to provide opportunities and resources for workplace wellness that promote regular physical activity.
3. Support communications campaigns such as Move Your Way® to celebrate successes or community action to implement physical activity strategies in communities.
4. Support programs that encourage and promote physical activity, including programs that provide social support and motivation to be active, and teach skills for how to safely engage in physical activity for people of all ages and abilities.

Increase Funding for Chronic Disease Prevention

1. Advocate for adequate and sustainable funding to support local public health chronic disease prevention efforts.
2. Expand funding to support local efforts focused on populations who bear a disproportionate burden of chronic disease, including rural populations, and racial and ethnic minority groups.

Encourage Community Design to Support Opportunities for Physical Activity

1. Coordinate with transportation departments to develop and implement policies that promote alternative modes of transportation, such as walking or biking.
2. Invest in supportive infrastructure such as protected bicycle lanes, greenways, sidewalks, and bicycle parking stations.
3. Support public transit agencies to integrate biking and walking project and programs to increase accessibility among people who bike, walk, and take transit.



4. Support safe and convenient access to streets for all users through features such as physically protected bike lanes, dedicated space for transit, accessible transit stops, frequent crossing opportunities, accessible pedestrian signals, curb extensions, traffic calming devices, benches and shade structures, and lighting.
5. Coordinate with City Planners, Community Developers and Land Use Departments to develop comprehensive plans to guide long-term development and zoning policies to influence use of land, while also considering the unintended consequences of changes to zoning policies and long-term development, such as the displacement of lower income communities and communities of color.
6. Promote environmental changes through infrastructure projects and non-infrastructure programming that make it easier for students to commute to school by walking, biking, or using other forms of active transportation.
7. Support implementation of Safe Routes to schools, parks, and other community destinations, including education and encouragement campaigns.
8. Support implementation of complete streets policies designed and operated to enable safe use and support mobility for all users. Those include people of all ages and abilities, regardless of whether they are travelling as drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists, or public transportation riders.
9. Collaboration between local health departments and school administration and staff on increasing opportunities for children to participate in physical activity, such as physical education classes, after school programs, and playgrounds accessible to all children and include joint use agreements. Expand physical activity opportunities in early childhood education centers including use of outdoor learning environments.
10. Integrate public health considerations in the community design process by participating in activities including but not limited to community planning, regulations, design of new development and redevelopment, and design of public areas to promote and protect the health of communities.
11. Assure equitable access to parks and greenspaces for physical activity; assure that all community members feel comfortable using physical activity infrastructure including parks and trails.

Build a Greater Public Health Workforce with Expertise in Physical Activity

1. Build capacity to monitor key outcome measures of physical activity interventions.
2. Develop interdisciplinary training so physical activity and public health concepts are connected to other disciplines, including health equity.
3. Support the creation of physical activity unit/department in local health departments that function as part of integrated and coordinated approach to chronic disease prevention.
4. Support implementation of promotional campaigns to encourage physical activity such as Move Your Way® and Active People, Healthy NationSM.

Justification

About half of American adults have one or more chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers. More than two-thirds of adults and nearly one-third of children and youth are overweight or obese. These high rates of overweight and obesity and chronic disease have persisted for decades and come not only with increased health risks, but also at inflated cost.

Research suggests that physically active adults “have lower rates of all-cause mortality, coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, type 2 diabetes, metabolic syndrome, colon cancer, breast cancer, and depression” than their physically inactive peers.¹ One of the most important things people can do to prevent chronic diseases and improve their health is to engage in regular physical activity. Currently, less than half of Americans meet federal activity guidelines of at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity per week and resistance training at least twice a week. As chronic diseases are widespread, the positive impact of physical activity has gained increased importance. Aside from individual factors, physical activity depends on policies focused in sports, health, transportation, education, social and cultural factors, and the built environment. These policies should work to address health inequities and consider opportunities to distribute power and resources to marginalized populations. Supporting environmental and policy interventions are effective strategies for increasing physical activity and improving health. Local health departments and communities can champion and support several policies that will improve community health, including the following.

Link Physical Activity to Chronic Disease Programs at the Health Department and in the Community

According to the NACCHO 2019 Profile Study Report, nearly 60% of local health departments provide services related to physical activity.² Local health departments can continue to provide physical activity services by implementing strategies into existing chronic disease prevention programs. These strategies should be evidence-based, community-led and adapted to fit the different needs and culture of a community. Examples include using communications tools such as the Move Your Way® campaign; and providing individual or social support for physical activity as part of existing Chronic Disease Self-Management education programs.

As an employer and leader in promoting healthy lifestyles, local health departments can create a worksite environment that provides opportunities and resources that promote physical activity for employees. Examples of this include providing incentives for active commuting and encouraging employees who are working remotely to be physically active at their location of work. Local health departments can also encourage time off to participate in activity classes, create social support groups, and provide environmental support such as showers and/or changing facilities.

Funding for Chronic Disease Prevention

Less than 3 percent of the estimated \$3.6 trillion the nation spends on health each year is spent on public health and prevention.³ Dedicated and sustained funding is critical to helping local communities support public health programs such as chronic disease prevention. With appropriate funding, communities could invest in chronic disease prevention and expand physical activity strategies among marginalized communities that are disproportionately influenced by social determinants of health and systemic oppression. Local health departments should continue to engage stakeholders and convene partners across sectors to advocate for

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2018). *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd edition*.

² National Association of County and City Health Officials. (2020). *2019 National Profile of Local Health Departments*. Retrieved June 2, 2022, from https://www.naccho.org/uploads/downloadable-resources/Programs/Public-Health-Infrastructure/NACCHO_2019_Profile_final.pdf

³ Trust for America’s Health. (2021). *The Impact of Chronic Underfunding on America’s Public Health System: Trends, Risks, and Recommendations, 2021*. Retrieved June 6, 2022, from https://www.tfah.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/2021_PHFunding_Fnl.pdf

adequate, equitable, and sustainable funding that will build integrated systems and programs that improve health and health equity.

Community Design Through Active Transportation and Built Environment Approaches

Research demonstrates that thoughtful community design and land-use decisions can encourage physical activity. Sidewalks and bicycle or walking paths between destinations work to improve walkability of communities and allow people of all ages and abilities to participate in various forms of physical activity such as walking, biking, running, or rolling. Modifying the built environment by adding safe sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, and protected bike lanes would help communities by improving safety and increasing interaction between residents. According to Healthy People 2020, the increase in legislative policies for the built environment has worked to improve accessibility and availability of physical activity opportunities.

Active transportation encourages people to be physically active throughout the day, potentially improving their health. Walking or bicycling as a form of transportation is an effective way to meet the daily physical activity recommendations. Overall, there is a 12% reduction in mortality and an 11% reduction in risk of cardiovascular disease associated with active transportation.⁴

For many in the United States, lifestyles are dependent on car travel and provide few opportunities for physical activity. Reducing car dependence is important for increasing opportunities for bicycling and walking, and decreased reliance on automobiles would benefit the environment by reducing air pollution.⁵ Active transportation and physical activity are more likely to occur in places with a variety of land uses, a comprehensive network of pedestrian, bicycle, and public transportation facilities, inviting street design for all users, and safety measures. For policymakers, seeking to develop and implement policies that promote alternative modes of transportation would be beneficial as it engages people in healthy physical activity while they travel long or short distances. To support increased accessibility to active transportation, investments to supportive infrastructure such as bicycle lanes, greenways, and sidewalks would include people of all ages and abilities in a safe and enjoyable environment.⁶

The built environment encompasses all physical aspects of where people live and work including homes, buildings, streets, open spaces, and infrastructure. The inability to safely walk or bike to where people need to go to contributes to serious health problems, with 93.3 million Americans suffering from obesity and one in every four adults engaging in no leisure time physical activity.⁷

Recent strategies such as, Complete Streets are designed and operated to prioritize safety, comfort, and access to destinations for all people who use the street, particularly those who have experienced systemic underinvestment or whose needs have not been met through a traditional transportation approach, such as older adults, people with disabilities, people who cannot afford

⁴ Freeland, A. L., Banerjee, S. N., Dannenberg, A. L., & Wendel, A. M. (2013). Walking associated with public transit: Moving Toward Increased Physical Activity in the United States. *American Journal of Public Health, 103*(3), 536–542. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2012.300912>.

⁵ CDC. (2020, August 24). *Designing activity-friendly communities*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/features/walk-friendly-communities/index.html>.

⁶ CDC. (2020, August 24). *Designing activity-friendly communities*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/features/walk-friendly-communities/index.html>.

⁷ "DNPAO Data, Trends and Maps: Explore by Topic | CDC." Accessed January 11, 2022.

https://nccd.cdc.gov/dnpao_dtm/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=DNPAO_DTM.ExploreByTopic&isIClass=PA&isITopic=PA1&go=GO.

