



A NATIONAL REVIEW OF LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PROGRAMS AND POLICIES

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BACKGROUND

Physical Activity is vital to maintaining and improving the health and wellbeing of people of all ages. Approximately half of American adults have one or more chronic diseases, many of which can be improved or prevented with regular physical activity. In 2018, The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released the [Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd Edition](#) – a resource for health professionals and policy makers that provides recommendations on how everyone can improve their health through regular physical activity. Alongside the Physical Activity Guidelines, HHS also launched the [Move Your Way[®]](#) campaign. The Move Your Way[®] campaign turns recommendations from the Physical Activity Guidelines into easy-to-understand physical activity guidance for adults, families, and health professionals — including free fact sheets, posters, videos, and interactive tools — available in both English and Spanish. Another federal physical activity initiative, [Active People, Healthy NationSM](#), is a national effort led by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to help 27 million Americans become more physically active by 2027. The initiative highlights evidence-based strategies to increase physical activity, such as activity-friendly routes to everyday destinations and community-wide campaigns, like the Move Your Way[®] campaign.

Local health departments (LHDs) play a critical role in identifying and implementing strategies at the local level that support the health of communities, including programs and policies that help people incorporate physical activity into their daily lives. With support from the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) is working to increase awareness, dissemination, and use of the *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans* and related campaigns/initiatives among local health departments and their partners.

An assessment was conducted to understand the facilitators, challenges, lessons learned, and resource needs of LHDs that are engaged in promoting physical activity. To carry out the assessment, NACCHO administered an online survey in February 2021. A total of 547 LHDs received the survey. Of these, 74 completed the survey for a 14% response rate. The assessment included 12 questions and was distributed online via Qualtrics Survey Software™. Each health department self-reported current and ongoing activities.

Sites were selected for inclusion in the survey using stratified random sampling, with sites characterized by the size of the populations served (small, medium, large) (<50,000, 50K-499K, >500,000). In most cases, where it was known, the survey was sent to chronic disease or physical activity staff at LHDs. Final analysis used post-stratification survey rates to adjust for variations in response rates across the three strata (size of LHD).

Several efforts were made to boost response rates. Low response rates likely reflect strained public health resources, especially during the pandemic. Results of the survey are intended to broadly illustrate the state of physical activity programming at LHDs in the U.S.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY EFFORTS

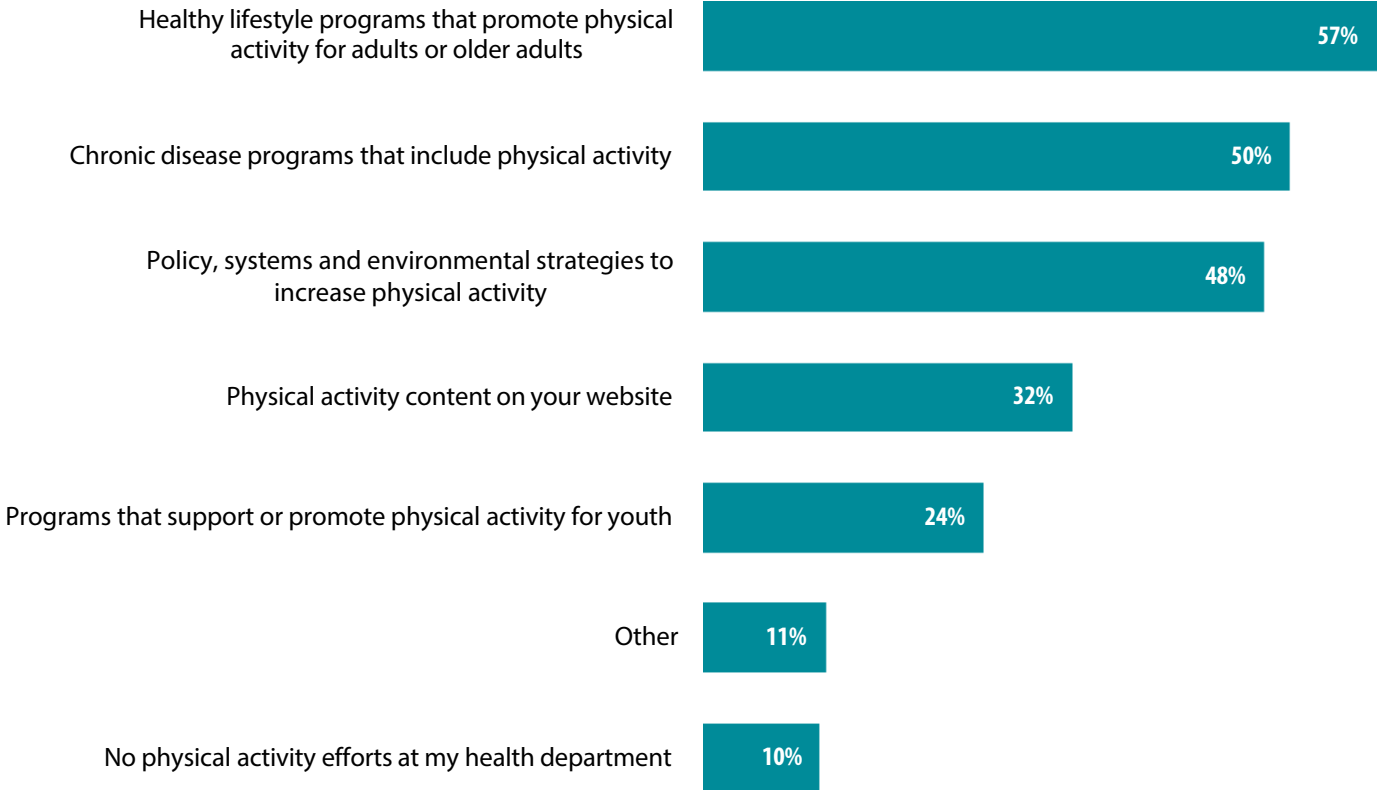


LHDs engage in diverse policy and programmatic activities to promote physical activity.

- The top two strategy areas local health departments engage in are healthy lifestyle programs that promote physical activity for adults and older adults (57%) and chronic disease programs that promote physical activity (50%).
- Almost half (48%) of reporting LHDs indicated working on policy, systems, and environmental strategies to increase physical activity.

Percent of LHDs reporting physical activity efforts in 2019 and/or 2020

n=74



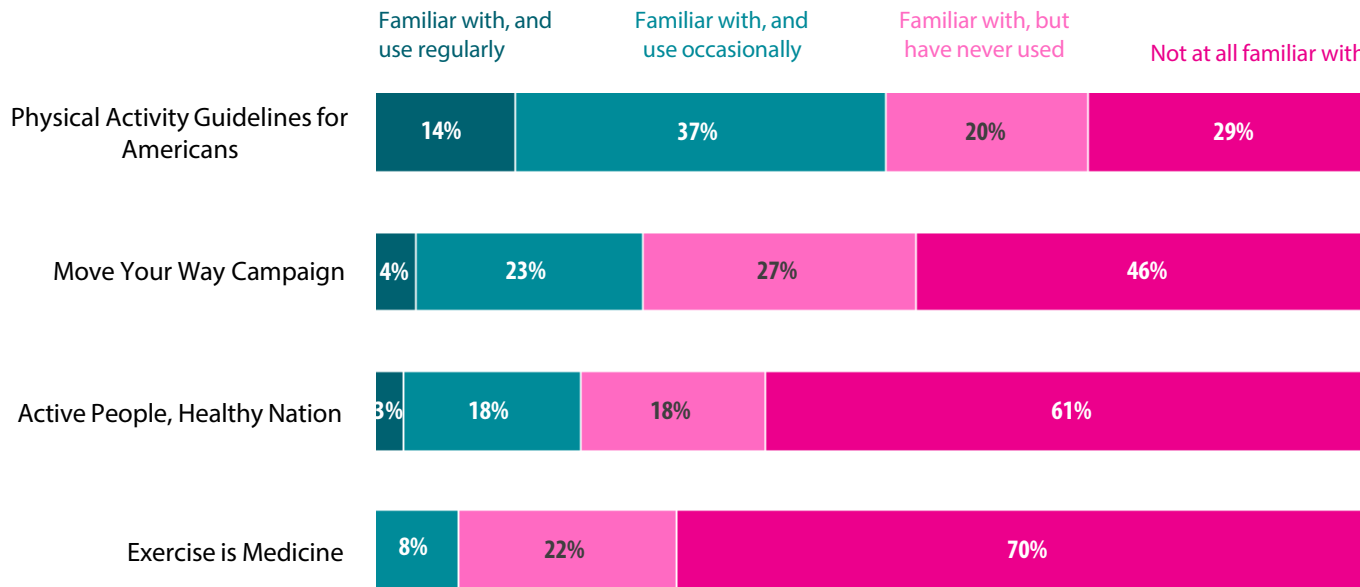
USE OF EXISTING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY RESOURCES



The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans is familiar to LHDs and is the most used resource to inform programs and policies (51%). More than half (54%) of LHDs surveyed are familiar with the Move Your Way® Campaign, but only 27% reported using it regularly or occasionally.

Percent of LHDs reporting familiarity with and use of physical activity resources

n=74



Local health departments also reported using additional sources for physical activity information and guidance including cdc.gov and health.gov websites. Other websites and resources used include America Walks, AARP Walk Audit Toolkit, CDC website, Let's Move Campaign, State-level developed programs or State Health Improvement Plans, National Diabetes Prevention Program, CATCH, NAP-SAC, Safe Routes to School Program, American Academy of Lifestyle Medicine, Smart Growth America, National Association of Chronic Disease Directors, National Association of County and City Health Officials, and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

KEY PARTNERS

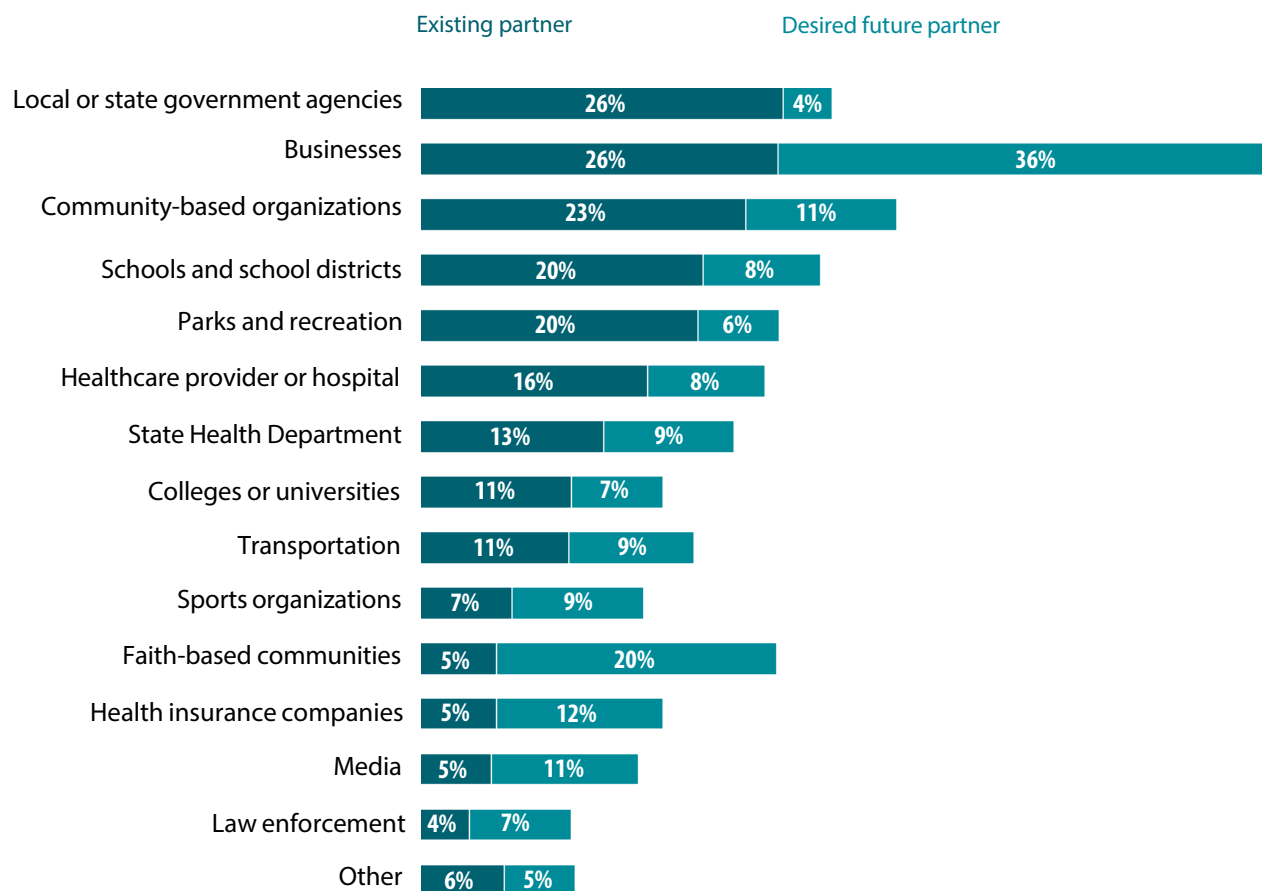


Coordination and collaboration between LHDs and other community partners is essential to implementing programs and developing policies to advance physical activity efforts.

About a quarter of LHDs partner with other local or state agencies in their physical activity work. Respondents also reported partnering with community-based organizations, businesses, schools, and parks and recreation. Many of those surveyed indicated a desire to grow their partnerships to include more businesses and faith-based organizations.

Percent of LHDs reporting key existing and/or desired partners in physical activity work

n=74



BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES



LHDs encounter barriers and challenges when implementing physical activity programs and policies.

Respondents indicated the barriers frequently encountered by their LHDs when implementing physical activity programs.

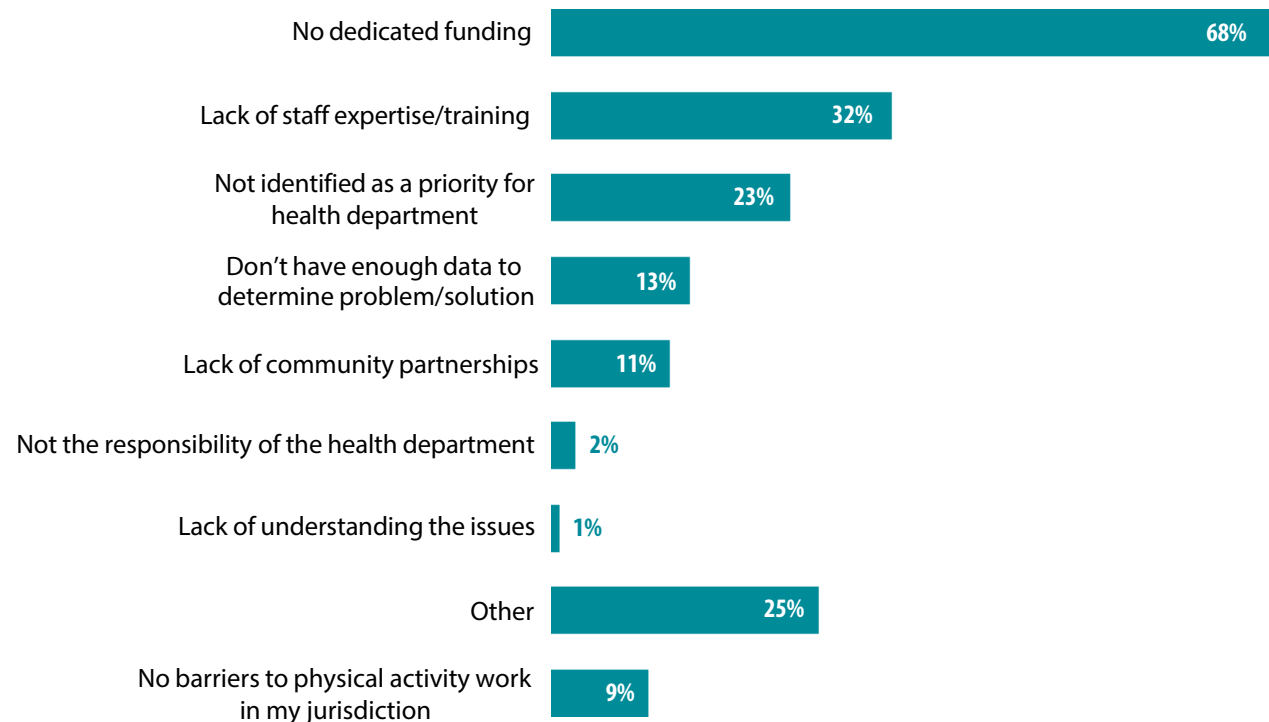
Most respondents (68%) selected funding as a barrier. Only 20% of survey respondents reported having dedicated funding to support physical activity related work.

Additional barriers included lack of training and staff expertise, need for community partnerships and/or it wasn't a priority for the health department.

Of the 25% of respondents that selected "other," a majority indicated COVID-19 as a barrier, taking staff away from performing regular programming.

Percent of LHDs reporting barriers to advancing physical activity work

n=74



TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

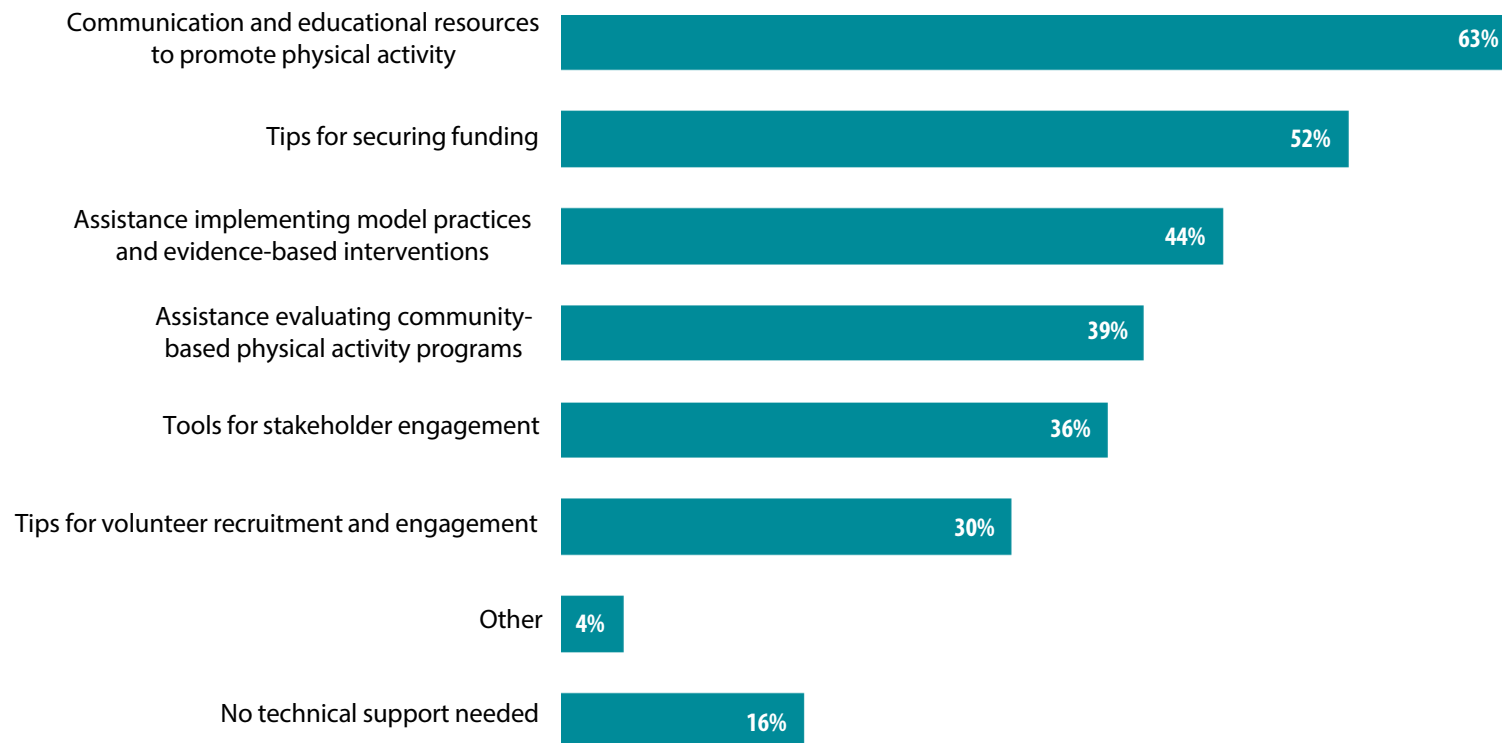


Local health departments (LHDs) were asked to select the topics for which they are interested in receiving technical assistance to advance physical activity efforts.

Respondents indicated several topic areas that they would be interested in receiving technical assistance. The top area identified was support around communication and educational resources to promote physical activity. Approximately half expressed interest in getting tips on securing funding (52%) or assistance implementing model practices and evidence-based interventions.

Percent of LHDs reporting desired areas for technical assistance and support

n=74



RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS



The following recommendations illustrate potential focus areas to strengthen community-level physical activity programs and policies in collaboration with local health departments.

1. Build capacity for Local Health Departments to expand physical activity specific programming and include physical activity as a component of existing chronic disease programs.

Physical activity helps reduce the risk of chronic disease and there is an opportunity to work with LHDs to strategically incorporate physical activity into existing and future chronic disease programs. Nearly one third of LHDs felt there was a need for training and expertise in physical activity among their staff. Funding is the most common barrier to advancing physical activity work with almost 70% reporting no dedicated funding for this work.

2. Promote the use of evidence-based interventions and resources to inform physical activity and chronic disease programming.

Implementing evidence-based interventions involves using the best available evidence to make informed public health practice decisions. While some LHDs surveyed knew where to access physical activity information, many were unaware of the variety of existing resources. Connecting LHDs to available evidence-based information and promoting resources such as the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, The Guide to Community Preventive Services, and other resources can strengthen chronic disease programming.

3. Leverage and build partnerships to expand physical activity programs.

Partnerships are key to the success of community-based physical activity programs. Approximately a quarter of LHDs reported existing partnerships in their physical activity work, and many more indicated a desire to build additional partnerships with businesses, faith-based organizations, and others.

4. Celebrate success and foster dissemination of physical activity and chronic disease efforts.

Many LHDs have successfully implemented community-level physical activity programs and policies. Sharing success stories is an effective way LHDs can learn from each other about best practices when leading physical activity efforts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The mission of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) is to improve the health of communities by strengthening and advocating for local health departments.

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