



Community Programs and Community Development

Communities can promote healthy eating and physical activity among their residents by creating the necessary infrastructure and economic development for those behaviors. However, those in the community must participate with nonprofit, philanthropic, and business sectors to make this happen. Whether interventions take the form of building more recreational areas, providing safe places for exercise, or making public policy that favors healthier food choices, planned development that comes from individuals in the community can assist people in living healthier lifestyles.

RATIONALE

Building an infrastructure to support healthy diets and regular physical activity requires a commitment to developing and sustaining health promoting policies, resources, and practices. Healthy communities are in a dynamic

state of renewal, continually creating and improving their physical and social environments and enabling all of their citizens to make healthy choices. An engaged citizenry is the core element of a strong community infrastructure.

The social, political, and cultural environments in communities affect the knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors related to diet and physical activity of all members. Effective community programs involve people in their homes, worksites, schools, places of worship and entertainment, civic organizations, and other public places. Community-based interventions involve the community in planning and creating environments that make the healthy choice the easiest choice for eating and physical activity. Community programs should focus on four goals:

1. Provide opportunities to learn how to be active, how to eat healthfully, and how to

- maintain a healthy weight among people of all ages.
2. Provide safe environments for physical activity.
 3. Provide accessible and affordable opportunities for all people to be active and eat healthfully.
 4. Eliminate disparities in support and resources for physical activity and healthy eating.

These goals can be achieved by community programs that

- increase the number of citizens and organizations who are involved in planning and conducting community programs and who participate in other related community activities, such as transportation, park, and land use planning;
- organize disenfranchised groups and advocate equity in health (e.g., strengthening food security programs or organizing community groups to demand secure recreation areas);
- use state and local social marketing, media advocacy, and countermarketing campaigns that inform, educate, and engage citizens about nutrition, physical activity, and obesity-related policies and issues in their communities;
- promote the adoption of public and private food and physical activity policies and community infrastructure (e.g., sidewalks, farmers markets, retail grocers, and public health impact statements to support healthy eating and physical activity); and
- measure outcomes using a range of surveillance and evaluation techniques.

SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

1. Promote sustained physical activity lifestyles for adults and children, such as brisk walking or cycling, as defined by national guidelines (e.g., CDC/ACSM guidelines). (See Pate et al. 1995.)
2. Use multiple channels for interventions, such as retail food outlets, transit and recreation/leisure facilities, worksites, and social service centers to reach the general population and targeted subgroups within the community.

3. Coordinate community-wide, geographically specific, or multichannel projects—like coalitions, planning, and lateral integration—that use community development and consumer empowerment approaches. This strategy includes initial assessments with environmental scans, goal setting, and feedback loop.

4. Create advocacy and policy projects that fully utilize available federal food assistance programs for children, seniors, and low-income persons and state-specific resources, such as increasing participation in the food stamp program and increasing the availability and quality of the school breakfast and lunch programs.

5. Conduct community-wide healthy eating and physical activity special events, regular programming, and media campaigns.

6. Change zoning and land use requirements to mandate sidewalks, trails, safe pedestrian and bicycle access to schools, shopping, parks, and recreation centers.

7. Allow vending machines and cafeterias on school property to offer only healthy foods and drinks.

8. Keep schools and grounds open before and after school hours for public use, and offer after-school activity programs that are accessible and affordable for all students.

9. Promote governmental and nongovernmental organization policies that promote physical activity and healthy eating (e.g., at worksites, places of worship, at meetings, in health insurance coverage).

10. Promote increased bicycling by providing bike parking in front of buildings and in public spaces and by also providing bike carriers and access on buses, light rail, and other public transportation.

Sample Practices and Programs

Missouri Department of Health Community Physical Activity Programs—Working with the Missouri Department of Health and the Saint Louis University Prevention Research Center, community coalitions in southeast Missouri conducted a needs assessment, then planned and constructed 13 community walking trails, and concluded the project by conducting follow-up interviews and surveys of trail users and community residents. The trails stimu-

lated increased activity and access to safe activity for residents. **Contact:** Ross Brownson, brownson@slu.edu, 314-977-8110.

Cool Kids—This project in Virginia educates parents of overweight two- to four-year-old children enrolled in the WIC program about the benefits of healthier eating and improved physical activity for their children. Parents learn to purchase more nutritious foods, to encourage healthier snacking habits, and to influence their children to be more engaged in play instead of watching television. **Contact:** Virginia Department of Health, kheise@vdh.state.va.us.

Zuni Wellness Center—A comprehensive program emphasizing healthful lifestyles for the prevention of diabetes, hypertension, dyslipidemia, and alcoholism. The most successful and established component is the Zuni Fitness Series, emphasizing nutrition and physical activity. **Contact:** Zuni Wellness Center, gloria.lucero@mail.ihs.gov.

Michigan Fitness Foundation—The goal of this program is to finance and support physical fitness, health, and sports through public information, fundraising, curriculum development, coalitions, and partnerships. A statewide network of Regional Councils on Physical Fitness, Health, and Sports has been implemented and several projects are under way. **Contact:** Michigan Fitness Foundation, www.michiganfitness.org.

Arthritis Self-Help Course—Developed at Stanford University, this course has been demonstrated effectively with Hispanic populations in Florida. The Florida Department of Health's Arthritis Prevention and Education Program worked with community-based organizations to teach the course in group settings while encouraging increased physical activity. Results have shown a reduction of arthritis pain by 20% and a reduction of physician visits by 40%. **Contact:** Heather Murphy, heather_murphy@doh.state.fl.us.

Healthy Indian Kids Exercise Study (HIKES)—Designed to reduce obesity and diabetes in children, this program in southwest Oklahoma engages community residents, physical education teachers, and parents to teach children about healthy food choices, to negotiate the use of school athletic facilities for after-school

hours, and to supervise after-school free play and team sports.

Contact: William Moore, william-moore@ouhsc.edu, 405-271-2330.

Protective Life Corporation Workplace Wellness Program—This worksite program in Alabama provides an environment to enhance employee skills to achieve wellness and to create a culture that encourages healthy lifestyles. An employee "pro-health team" provides ideas and energy for the program. Health assessments, health education, fitness and sports activities, nutrition consultation, "free fruit" days, health screening, and physical activity incentives are provided. **Contact:** Protective Life Corporation, 800-866-3555, ext. 3129.

Sisters Together: Move More, Eat Better—The goals of this program are to encourage personal change, support normative changes, and strengthen and expand local resources to prevent obesity. An information campaign is wrapped within a community development model with an emphasis on social marketing. Activities include tip sheets, recipes, stories, a walking booklet, hair care tips for exercising women, and a resource guide. A manual is also available. **Contact:** Sisters Together, www.hsph.harvard.edu/sisterstogether.

California Adolescent Nutrition and Fitness (CANFit)—A comprehensive program to improve the nutritional status and physical fitness of low-income African American, American Indian, Latino, and Asian/Pacific Islander youths, ages 10 to 14. Local projects build community leadership; implement multilevel interventions; leverage additional resources; provide scholarships to study nutrition, physical activity, public health, or culinary arts; and evaluate and disseminate viable projects. Program materials include proposal guidelines, bibliographies, a guidebook, and a newsletter. **Contact:** California Adolescent Nutrition and Fitness Program, www.canfit.org, 510-644-1533.

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