

# FACTS

## Creating Spaces

### Creating Spaces That Promote Active Living

#### OVERVIEW

The way communities are designed and developed can effect physical activity and obesity rates.<sup>1,2</sup> Environments that are safe and built with walking, biking and other physical activities in mind are correlated with lower body weights and reduced cardiovascular disease.<sup>3,4</sup> Conversely, a sedentary lifestyle puts people at risk for diabetes, heart disease and premature death.<sup>5</sup>

Integrating health considerations within community design – known as the built environment – can create more active communities and transportation options for healthier living.<sup>6</sup> Parks, office buildings, walkways and urban spaces are also considered built environments. Community planning and health behavior research demonstrate that built environments influence people’s decision to use public transport, drive, walk, or cycle to get to their destination.<sup>7,8</sup>

#### WHY IT MATTERS

Rates of obesity now exceed 20% in every state, with rates in 45 states above 25% and 22 states above 30%. Rates in Arkansas, West Virginia and Mississippi surpass 35% (Figure 1).<sup>11</sup> According to current trends, 51% of adults will be obese by 2030.<sup>12</sup> Nearly 80% of US adults and 75% of adolescents do not get the recommended weekly amount of aerobic and strengthening activity.<sup>13,14</sup> When considering these data, it is imperative that today’s built environments help increase physical activity.<sup>9,10</sup>

#### BUILDING ACTIVE COMMUNITIES

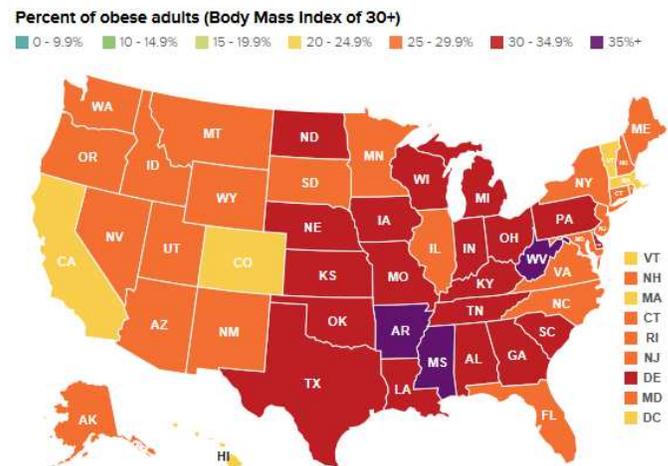
People across the US interact with their built environments constantly, affecting quality of life and years of healthy life lived.<sup>15</sup> Sound built environments can influence health through design and program elements.<sup>16</sup> Examples include<sup>16</sup>:

- **Safe Routes to School** enables more children to safely walk and bike to school. Community leaders prioritize the safety of these routes and are working to reduce traffic congestion and improve health and the environment.
- **Complete Streets** policies consider the needs of all users in all transportation projects

incorporating walking, bicycling, public transportation, and driving.

- **Smart Growth Design** communities are designed with active living as the focus and are connected with street patterns that make it easy to walk or bike to destinations. Developers try to locate essential services like schools and stores closer to homes to encourage walking and provide green spaces for recreation.
- **Shared Use of School Facilities** agreements allow schools to share their physical activity facilities (gyms, running and walking tracks, multi-purpose rooms) with the community for recreation and exercise opportunities.
- **Transportation Enhancements** activities offer funding opportunities to help expand transportation choices in communities, including pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and safety programs as well as conversion of abandoned railway corridors to trails.
- **Recreational Trails Program (RTP)** provides funds to states to develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities for both non-motorized and motorized recreational trail uses. Federal transportation funds benefit recreation including hiking, bicycling, in-line skating, equestrian use, and cross-country skiing.

Figure 1: Adult Obesity Rate by State, 2014



Source: CDC

## INVESTING IN GOOD BUILT ENVIRONMENTS MAKES SENSE

Investing in the built environment can facilitate economic development in communities.<sup>17</sup> Local economies are improved when people can walk, bike and shop with ease in a community.<sup>18</sup> Studies also show that community gardens and walking or biking trails have a positive impact on surrounding residential properties, by increasing rates of home ownership and property value to spur economic development.<sup>19,20</sup> A national survey reveals that the ability to walk or bike through a neighborhood is a strong factor in determining where to relocate when considering a move.<sup>21</sup>

Other research indicates that building bike and pedestrian trails reduce health care costs associated with physical inactivity.<sup>22</sup> For every dollar invested in building trails, nearly three dollars in medical cost savings may be achieved.<sup>23</sup>

## A SOUND BUILT ENVIRONMENT AFFECTS COMMUNITY HEALTH

People who have parks or recreational facilities nearby and live in communities with well-connected streets exercise much more than those who do not have easy access.<sup>24</sup> Community-based physical activity interventions are cost-effective, reducing new cases of many chronic diseases and improving quality of life.<sup>25</sup>

## THE ASSOCIATION ADVOCATES

The American Heart Association supports initiatives that create more livable and active communities and advocates for the following policy recommendations:

- Robust funding for the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), which includes Safe Routes to School and transportation enhancements projects.
- Sustained concentrated funding to assist communities in implementing active transportation networks.
- Requirements that state departments of transportation, metropolitan planning organizations, and cities adopt complete streets policies that consider the needs of all users in all transportation projects - whether walking, bicycling, public transportation, or driving – and reduce the need to retrofit existing roads and paths.
- Tax incentives to support school construction and physical activity facilities.
- Incorporation of health impact assessments into community planning.
- Integration of shared use agreements into the existing federal and state programs and statewide recreation plans (SCORPs).

- 1 Zhang, X, et al. Neighborhood commuting environment and obesity in the United States: An urban–rural stratified multilevel analysis. 2014. *Preventive medicine*: 59; 31-36.
- 2 Townsend T, et al. Obesogenic urban form: theory, policy And practice. 2009. *Health & Place*. 15, 909---916.
- 3 Papas MA, et al. The built environment and obesity. 2004. *Epidemiologic Reviews*, 29 (1), 129---143.
- 4 Urban Land. 2014. Open Spaces and Active Transportation. Retrieved on May 13, 2014: <http://urbanland.uli.org/planningdesign/open-spaces-and-active-transportation/>
- 5 Chomistek, AK., et al. The Relationship of Sedentary Behavior and Physical Activity to Incident Cardiovascular Disease: Results from the Women’s Health Initiative. 2013. *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*.
- 6 Sallis, JF., et al. Role of built environments in physical activity, obesity, and cardiovascular disease. 2012. *Circulation* 125.5: 729-737.
- 7 Saelens B et al. Neighbourhood-based differences in physical activity: an environment scale evaluation. *American Journal of Public Health*, 2003, 93:1552–1558.
- 8 Ranchod, YK., et al. Longitudinal associations between neighborhood recreational facilities and change in recreational physical activity in the multi-ethnic study of atherosclerosis, 2000–2007. 2014. *American journal of epidemiology* 179.3: 335-343.
- 9 Mozaffarian, D., et al. Heart disease and stroke statistics-2015 update: a report from the American Heart Association. *Circulation*. 2015. 131(4): e29-e322.
- 10 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey: 2011-2012: 2012. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhanes/search/datapage.aspx?Component= Dietary> . Accessed on March 15, 2016.
- 11 <http://stateofobesity.org/adult-obesity/>
- 12 Finkelstein EA, et al.. Obesity and severe obesity forecasts through 2030. *Am J Prev Med*. 2012;42:563–570.
- 13 National Center for Health Statistics. National Health Interview Survey, 2013. Public-use data file and documentation. [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis/quest\\_data\\_related\\_1997\\_forward.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis/quest_data_related_1997_forward.htm). NCHS tabulations. Accessed April 21, 2015.
- 14 Fakhouri, TH., et al. Physical activity in u.s. Youth aged 12-15 years, 2012. NCHS Data Brief: 2014;(141): 1-8.
- 15 <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/environmental-health>
- 16 White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity. Report to the President. 2010. Available at: [http://www.letsmove.gov/sites/letsmove.gov/files/TaskForce\\_on\\_Childhood\\_Obesity\\_May2010\\_FullReport.pdf](http://www.letsmove.gov/sites/letsmove.gov/files/TaskForce_on_Childhood_Obesity_May2010_FullReport.pdf)
- 17 Built Environment & Active Transportation. The Benefits of Active Transportation”Physical Activity Strategy. Ed. Andrea Keen. Available at: [http://physicalactivitystrategy.ca/pdfs/BEAT/BEAT\\_Publication.pdf](http://physicalactivitystrategy.ca/pdfs/BEAT/BEAT_Publication.pdf). Accessed on April 21, 2015.
- 18 Handy SL, et al. Is support for traditionally designed communities growing? Evidence from two national surveys. 2008. *Journal of the American Planning Association*; 74(2): 209-221.
- 19 Gough MZ, et al. Public Gardens as Sustainable Community Development Partners: Motivations, Perceived Benefits, and Challenges. 2013. *Urban Affairs Review*.
- 20 Trails and Greenways Clearinghouse. 2007. *Economic Benefits of Trails and Greenways*.
- 21 Handy SL, et al. Is support for traditionally designed communities growing? Evidence from two national surveys. 2008. *Journal of the American Planning Association*; 74(2): 209-221.
- 22 Wang G, et al. A cost-benefit analysis of physical activity using bike/pedestrian trails. *Health Promotion Practice*: 2005; 6(2): 174-9.
- 23 Mendoza, JA. et al., Ethnic Minority Children’s Active Commuting to School and Association with Physical Activity and Pedestrian Safety Behaviors. 2010. *Journal of Applied Research on Children*. 1(1).
- 24 Frank L, et al. Urban form relationships with walk trip frequency and distance among youth. 2007. *American Journal of Health Promotion*:21(4S): 305.
- 25 Roux L., et al., Cost-effectiveness of community-based physical activity programs. 2008. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*: 35(6):578-588.