

Research Brief



Stepping Up Active Transportation in Community Health Improvement Plans

Overview

Active transportation, such as biking or walking to work, can build physical activity into the day and contribute to health. The Community Preventive Services Task Force provides evidence-based guidance on how land use and transportation plans, policies, and designs promote active transportation. Local health departments can contribute by helping develop Community Health Improvement Plans (CHIPs). The Public Health Accreditation Board requires health departments seeking voluntary accreditation to participate in CHIP development. The purpose of this analysis was to determine which approaches to improve physical activity through active transportation have been included in CHIPs and understand which local health department characteristics are related to inclusion.

Main Question

What can public health agencies and other stakeholders do to actively contribute to decisions around land use and transportation?

Study

In collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control-funded Physical Activity Policy Research Network Plus, the study developed and conducted an online survey with local health departments. The survey was administered June – October 2017 with a random sample of 693 US local health departments. This report analyzed results of questions related to 8 strategies with research evidence for increasing active transportation. UMass Medical School Institutional Review Board approved this study. A total of 30.2% of the health departments contacted completed the survey. Of these, 45.6% reported including at least one of the 8 strategies in a CHIP. The top strategies were Safe Routes to School, healthy community design, transit access, and traffic safety and injury prevention.

The Bottom Line

Accreditation by the Public Health Accreditation Board, use of credible information sources, and collaboration on a Community Health Assessment are important factors for inclusion of active transportation strategies in a CHIP.

Source

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Spotlight on Results

- 45.6% of health departments reported including at least 1 active transportation strategy in a CHIP.
- Common strategies were Safe Routes to School (22.3%), healthy community design (20.6%) transit access (19.5%) and traffic safety and injury prevention (19.2%).
- Health departments were more apt to include active transportation strategies if they were nationally accredited/pursuing accreditation, used credible information sources, or participated in a Community Health Assessment.

Call for Action

Helping develop a local CHIP is an opportunity for local health departments to promote strategies for active transportation. A place to start could be promoting walking to school with the Safe Routes to School strategy.

