

Active Communities

Overview

The Active Communities Program is committed to elevating community engagement and advocacy to identify and implement effective environmental interventions that make physical activity and active transportation safer, easier, and more accessible to everyone in Minneapolis.

Improving opportunities for physical activity and active transportation

People who are physically active tend to live longer and are at lower risk for chronic diseases such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers. Physical activity can also contribute to positive mental wellbeing, educational achievement, and social connectedness.

The environment in which we live plays a significant role in developing healthy habits, such as being physically active. Yet, access to parks and trails, safe streets, and pedestrian and biking-friendly neighborhoods are not equally available across all communities.

Low-income individuals and many people from racial and ethnic minority groups are less likely to have access to these safe spaces. Historical land use and housing and transportation policies have contributed to limited access. People impacted by these disparities are also less likely to meet the physical activity recommendations.

Advancing health equity means creating environments where everyone has access to safe and convenient opportunities to be physically active, regardless of race, education, socio-economic status, disability status and geographic location.



Active Communities

Our current focus

To create environments that make it easier for everyone in Minneapolis to integrate physical activity as part of everyday life, we focus on:

Improving infrastructure in underserved neighborhoods helps people reach schools, jobs, shops, and parks. This makes walking, rolling in wheelchairs, and biking safer for everyone.

Driving community involvement and empowering community voice to provide input that can influence street improvement projects.

Creating safe, desirable, and convenient opportunities to help people incorporate physical activity into their everyday activities.

Collaboration, partnerships and community empowerment

Changing the physical environment to promote active lifestyles requires collaboration among diverse sectors. The Active Communities initiative brings partners together to identify strategies for tackling barriers to physical activity while leveraging community input.

Over the past ten years, the Active Communities initiative has collaborated with educational, governmental, and community-based organizations to aid the most vulnerable groups that have experienced health disparities due to environments that lack support for physical activity. By engaging community members to share their input on ways to improve the environments and thus physical activity in their neighborhoods, public spaces and buildings, the decision-making process is better informed.



By cultivating these partnerships, we become agents of change, for example:

- Safe Routes to School is a collaborative effort with Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) to make it safer and easier for students to get to school regardless of the transportation they use. The program includes educational activities and street improvements to create safer walking and biking environments.
- Active Communities collaborates with the Minneapolis Public Works Department to integrate community involvement in capital improvement projects. Developing strategies to involve the public during project planning is a key step in assessing priorities and determining if the project will address community needs and expectations.
- Partnering with Minneapolis Public Works Department, Minneapolis Parks & Recreation Board, Little Earth Residents Association, Cultural Wellness Center, and the Loppet Foundation to implement community design changes in the Little Earth and East Phillips neighborhoods; increase safety, utilization and cultural connection to green spaces in North Minneapolis; and recommend final design features for the planned Northside Greenway.



Driving sustainable changes together

Policies, systems and environments (PSE) shape physical spaces and how we move through neighborhoods. Active Communities and its partners collaborate to promote PSE changes, so all people in Minneapolis have safe and accessible opportunities to walk, bike and roll as modes of active transportation and for recreational purposes. For example, Active Communities:

- Supported the implementation of the 2020-2022 Minneapolis Vision Zero plan to lower speed limits to 20 miles per hour on city-owned streets. Traffic calming techniques were also explored to slow car traffic and improve crossing safety for pedestrians and bikers.
- Currently leads system changes that focus on creating processes to build authentic collaborations with community partners and to proactively integrate community input before plans are set for street improvement.



A success story



The Healthy Living Initiative (HLI) partnership with MPS since 2008 has been long and impactful. Funded by the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) program, this collaboration has worked towards changes focused on the health and safety of students. In the past few years, this collaboration has helped procure four school-based bike fleets to provide students increased opportunities for biking and supplemented a Universal Bike Education curriculum in MPS schools.

During the 2022-2023 school year, 3,000 elementary school students biked more than 20,000 miles.

Going forward

Promoting active modes of transportation and physical activity can have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities at large. Successful plans in partnership with individuals and organizations within the local community can transform environments to benefit the most vulnerable neighborhoods.

Join us in identifying opportunities to reimagine new and different physical activity initiatives, encourage deeper community engagement, and consider partnering with us in our mission to make Minneapolis a place where healthy communities thrive.

Unsafe conditions of sidewalks, streets and recreational spaces can discourage physical activity.



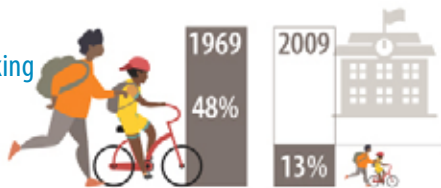
Traffic crashes disproportionately impact people in neighborhoods with lower incomes.

For example, while 24% of streets in the city are located in low-income neighborhoods where a majority of residents are people of color, 44% of severe crashes occur in these neighborhoods.¹



Bicyclists and pedestrians are over represented in severe and fatal crashes.²

The percentage of children walking or biking to school has dropped dramatically within one generation.³



In a 2022 survey of 500 Minneapolis residents, respondents ranked safety concerns as a leading reason for not using parks.⁴

Creating or modifying environmental characteristics in a community contributes to making physical activity easier or more accessible for everyone.

Sources

1. Minneapolis VISION ZERO Action Plan 2020-2022 (p. 36). (2019). City of Minneapolis. <https://www.minneapolismn.gov/media/-www-content-assets/documents/VZ-Action-Plan-2020-22.pdf>
2. Ibid.
3. Brown, A., Jones, K., Marchetti, L., Pullen, N., Scully, M., & Zegeer, C. (n.d.). *The Decline of Walking and Bicycling* [Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center (PBIC)]. Safe Routes to School Guide. http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/introduction/the_decline_of_walking_and_bicycling.cfm
4. Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board, 2022 Resident Study (p. 34) (2022). [Resident Study By The Morrison Leatherman Company]. Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board. <https://www.minneapolisparks.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/2023-01-11-MPRB-2022-Survey-PowerPoint.pdf>

The health benefits of physical activity



Keeps your heart healthy



Reduces the risk of diabetes



Reduces the risk of respiratory diseases



Increases your energy levels



Helps manage a healthy personal weight



Builds muscle & strong bones



Reduces feelings of stress & anxiety and improves sleep



Improves your balance, reducing the risk of injury from falls



Supports your brain function & memory

... helps people live longer healthier lives.

For more information contact:

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We invite you to join us in our efforts to create healthier communities together in Minneapolis.



Building Healthier Communities



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