

The UMass Worcester Prevention Research Center, located at UMass Medical School in Worcester, MA, is a member of the CDC's Prevention Research Center (PRC) network. Our work promotes healthy lifestyles through increased opportunities for physical activity, healthy eating and healthy weight. For more information, visit: www.umassmed.edu/prc
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Overview

Regular physical activity is important for health and well-being. Local communities can increase opportunities for walking and bicycling by making local decisions and policies that enhance streets, sidewalks, trails, public transportation infrastructure, parks and other recreational facilities. Land-use planners and transportation/public works officials are typically responsible for setting these policies, and local health departments are less likely to be involved. National public health authorities encourage local health departments to engage in land use and transportation policy decision-making because these policies impact health.

Main Questions

- What is the value of local health departments' participation in land use and transportation policy decision-making?
- What is the potential role of local health departments in the decision-making process?

Study

Interviews were conducted with 49 state and local professionals from multiple disciplines including public health, land-use planning, transportation/public works, and other (municipal administration and bicycle and pedestrian advocates) in 13 U.S. states. Respondents were asked questions about their perspectives on the potential value and contributions that local health department officials can offer as communities make decisions and policies that affect physical activity opportunities. The sample was identified by members of the Physical Activity Policy Research Network Plus (PAPRN+).

The Bottom Line

Seven potential local health department contributions were identified where local health departments can leverage their strengths to engage in land-use and transportation policy decision-making and foster collaborations with other sectors.

Source

Sreedhara M, Goins KV, Aytur SA, Lyn R, Maddock JE, Riessman R, Schmid TL, Wooten H, Lemon SC. Qualitative Exploration of Cross-Sector Perspectives on the Contributions of Local Health Departments in Land-Use and Transportation Policy. *Prev Chronic Dis.* 2017 Nov 22;14:E118. doi: 10.5888/pcd14.170226. PMID: 29166249

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Call for Action

Sustainable capacity building strategies that involve increasing local health departments' skills, infrastructure and resources are needed to improve their involvement in physical activity policy decision-making.

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Spotlight on Results

7 potential local health department contributions:

- 1) **Physical activity and health perspective** – Local health departments can bring valuable emphasis on health impacts of land-use and transportation to local decisions. (N=44)
- 2) **Data analysis and assessment** – Local health departments can access, collect, analyze, and collaborate on health data and assessments. (N=41)
- 3) **Partnerships** – Local health departments can build and develop new relationships with diverse partners. (N=35)
- 4) **Public education** – Local health departments can educate communities on health benefits and enhance public support for transportation and land use policies and projects. (N=27)
- 5) **Knowledge of evidence base and best practices** – Local health departments can share research from public health and active transportation literature and best practices from other communities. (N=23)
- 6) **Resource support** – Local health departments can leverage resources and assist with grant proposals. (N=20)
- 7) **Health equity** – Local health departments can focus a health equity lens on transportation and land-use policy processes. (N=8)