The Relationship Between Where We Live and Our Health

Avron Abraham, Ph.D
Department of Health, Nutrition and Exercise Sciences

William DeCoursey
Institute for Public Administration

University of Delaware
Healthy Communities - Project Overview

- Collaboration between the Department of Health, Nutrition, and Exercise Sciences and the Institute for Public Administration
- Funded by a grant from the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS)
- IPA has been working in municipal planning since the late 90’s and has helped over 20 towns with their comprehensive plans.
Healthy Communities - Project Overview

- Identify five partner communities
  - Conduct a mobility-friendly assessment
  - Craft a report for each community detailing barriers to walkability and opportunities for physical activity
  - Coordinate with a working committee from each community to devise an implementation plan.
  - Money, money, money
The connection between the way we build our communities and key public health trends such as:

• Obesity
• Asthma
• Depression
• Hypertension
• Diabetes

So the way we design communities and transportation systems to create walkable/bikeable neighborhoods, preserving open space, can help people maintain healthy habits.
FIGURE 1. Sprawl and Weight
Expected Weight for a 5’7” Adult (lbs.)

- Walton County: 167.3
- Hanover County: 167.2
- Clay County: 166.9
- Delaware County: 166.1
- Suffolk County: 164.9
- Queens County: 164.0
- Kings County: 163.1

More sprawling: Geauga County, Isanti County, El Dorado County, McHenry County

Less sprawling: Cook County, San Francisco County, Bronx County, New York County

County Sprawl Score

0 50 100 150 200 250 300 350 400
Cumulative Mortality by Distance Walked per Day

Disturbing Trends

**CANINE CONSTITUTIONAL**

A brisk walk in the park keeps Meara B in shape between dog shows. His owner, Columbus resident Cathy Stambaugh, got up early to give her 3-year-old Doberman his regular workout. They typically jog 15 miles in Berliner Park.
Trips to School by Distance and Mode

Reported Barriers to Walking & Biking to School (1999)

1999 HealthStyles Survey

Distance: 55%
Traffic: 40%
Other: 26%
Weather: 24%
Crime: 18%
School Policy: 7%
No Barriers: 16%
Surveys show that voters would support using Local, State, & Federal Funds...

- **54%** for more bike paths
- **61%** for more sidewalks
- **72%** for mandatory sidewalks in new developments
- **70%** to help ensure the safety of children to walk or ride bicycles to school

Source: EPA/CDC: Greenstyles Survey; Healthstyles 2000
Interventions addressing chronic disease risk factors, such as physical inactivity require, comprehensive, population-based approaches that incorporate both individual and societal-level strategies.
Incorporation of both active and passive approaches

Examples:

- Schools
- Community
- Worksites
- Recreation
The major impediment to use of the bicycle for transportation in sprawled suburbs is lack of connectivity. Consider the picture below:
Barriers to Walking and Biking

- Street connectivity
- Street design
- Site location/design
- Traffic volume/speed
- Travel choice
- Social norm
- Time
- Crime
Little separation exists between pedestrian and vehicular environments.

Tree lawns and unique paving patterns create a safer, more pedestrian environment. Directional signage was developed that reflects the historic character of the Village.
So what are we doing in Delaware?

• Delaware Division of Public Health – PSC 0687

• Executive Order Number 83

• Wilmapco/Greenways/DelDOT/ New Castle County/DE State Parks/ Delaware Greenways and local government
Examples of National Initiatives:

• NGA – National Governor’s Association
• Smart Growth
• Active Living By Design
• National Coalition to Promote Physical Activity
• Physical Activity Policy Research Network
  • Active Transport To and From School: A Multi-site Exploration of Physical Activity Policy
  • Exploring Policy Change in the Development of Community Trails