

Washington State

Active Community Environments

Public Health Problem

Nearly 60 percent of adults in Washington State are overweight or obese. One third are less physically active than the recommended amount. One possible contributing factor is the lack of access to safe places to be physical active.

Intervention Example

The State Department of Health, working collaboratively with the Department of Community Trade and Economic Development, Department of Transportation and Regional Transportation Planning Organizations, has supported the development of Active Living Task Forces in communities around the state. Nine communities were selected to receive funding, training and technical assistance for this project based on a series of health indicators (e.g. obesity rates, percent of older residents) and other criteria. The Active Living Task Forces have assisted the local Regional Transportation Planning Organizations to consider appropriate policy and environmental changes that will support an active community environment (ACE). An ACE is a place where people of all ages and abilities can easily enjoy walking, bicycling and other forms of recreation. An ACE has sidewalks, on-street bicycle facilities, multi-use paths and trails, parks, open space and recreational facilities. Mixed use development and a connected grid of streets are also encouraged.

Implications and Impact

The Washington State Growth Management Act was amended in 2005 and now guides city, county and regional elected officials and planners to increase physical activity opportunities in their comprehensive plans.

The collaboration of diverse partners in health, transportation, planning, and policy making has allowed communities to work toward the establishment of ACES. The nine communities have achieved a multitude of goals based on each of their assessed needs.

For example, Skagit County, which includes Mt. Vernon, has achieved the following:

- 1) Established an Active Living Task Force
- 2) Developed a Safe Routes to School program
- 3) Conducted an ACE assessment tool
- 4) Conducted an ACE workshop to train policy makers on the importance of considering physical activity in planning
- 5) Developed a new trail
- 6) Adopted a master trail plan (Mt Vernon)
- 7) Implemented trail signage, maps, an adopt-a-trail program and a trail counting system
- 8) Reviewed and changed comprehensive plans to include physical activity open spaces and trails
- 9) Updated the existing trail guide