

Completing Streets to Impact Cancer in Indiana

by: Emily Jones

SUMMARY

Staying physically active can contribute to a lower risk of cancer, a disease that kills roughly 12,000 Indiana residents each year. Complete Streets—an initiative aimed at making city streets accessible and attractive to pedestrians and cyclists as well as automobile traffic—increases the opportunities for residents to be physically active and reduce their cancer risks. The success of this program is an example of how statewide partnerships can collaborate to help Indiana citizens make healthier choices.



CHALLENGE

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Indiana. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 50% of all cancer deaths could be prevented by making healthy choices (e.g., not smoking, being physically active, staying at a healthy weight). Unfortunately, 30% of Indiana adults are obese and 40% do not meet recommended physical activity guidelines. Research shows that people living in neighborhoods where it is possible to walk and bike safely as well as use public transportation, complete 35–45 more minutes of physical activity per week, and are less likely to be overweight or obese. Statewide partners are responding to this challenge with improved street design to increase access to, and opportunities for, physical activity.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

Learn how a built environment—such as a Complete Street—can change the community at the Indiana Complete Streets site (<http://www.healthbydesignonline.org/IndianaCompleteStreetsCampaign.html>). Anyone interested in supporting the initiative can also join cyclist and pedestrian groups that encourage a physically active lifestyle through safer and more complete access to neighborhoods.

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SOLUTION

The Indiana State Department of Health's Cancer Control Section (CCS) partners with the Indiana Cancer Consortium (ICC) to inform stakeholders, the public, and policy makers of the health benefits associated with greater physical activity and its role in lowering cancer risk. The Indiana Complete Streets Coalition (ICSC) is a statewide coalition formed to ensure that communities throughout Indiana have neighborhoods, public spaces, and transportation systems that can support physical activity and healthy living. The CCS, ICC, and ICSC support each other by sharing information on the benefits of physical activity and Complete Streets. The idea of working together is to help make healthy choices the easiest choices.

RESULTS

According to the Indiana State Department of Health's Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity, 3,023,454 Indiana residents—or nearly 50% of the state's population—live in areas that mandate walkable, bicycle-friendly, and planned neighborhoods. Since 2009, 16 Complete Streets policies were put into place across Indiana. The policy in the capital, Indianapolis, is ranked by the National Complete Streets Coalition as one of the strongest in the United States. The development and implementation of these policies are supported by state transportation departments; street design and engineering, pedestrian, and bicycle interest groups; and state cancer programs. The ICC provided support through planned and coordinated communication, and a Complete Streets infographic (http://indianacancer.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/completestreets_10_1.jpg) to educate the public and decision makers about the importance of planned environments. This momentum led more communities throughout Indiana to embrace the Complete Streets model, exceeding the CCS and ICC's goal of seven communities implementing Complete Streets by 2015.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

The Complete Streets initiative supports roadways designed to promote active transportation. It helps to create safer streets; improve local economy; attract and benefit users of all races, ethnicities, and abilities; support community growth and development; improve the attractiveness of streets; and improve connectivity. The CCS and ICC continue supporting the ICSC in increasing the number of Complete Streets policies in Indiana through collaboration and education. The CCS and ICC maintain an active role in ICSC meetings. There are ongoing efforts to communicate the benefits of the program to the general public and to decision makers.