

# Complete Streets Initiative Addresses Physical Activity and Obesity in Louisiana

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## A National Comprehensive Cancer Control Program Success Story

### Summary

Louisiana has one of the highest rates of obesity (36%) in the United States. To reduce obesity rates in Lake Charles, Louisiana, Calcasieu Parish convened a multi-sector coalition through the Southwest Louisiana Area Health Education Center to make active lifestyles safe and convenient for everyone. In June 2017, Lake Charles City Council successfully implemented Complete Streets, an initiative that increases access to places for physical activity by using multiple strategies to make a community more walkable or bikeable. Lake Charles now has 6 miles of bike paths and plans to add pedestrian-friendly crosswalks and sidewalks.

### Challenge

Lake Charles has a combined overweight and obesity rate of almost 70%.<sup>1</sup> Being overweight or obese increases the risk for at least 13 kinds of cancer. In 2014, over 630,000 people in the United States were diagnosed with one of these cancers.<sup>2</sup> Physical activity is an essential component of weight control and lack of physical activity is independently linked to some kinds of cancer.<sup>3</sup>

The Partnership for Healthier Southwest Louisiana, the Louisiana Comprehensive Cancer Control Program, the Calcasieu Parish Police Jury, the Southwest Louisiana Economic Alliance, the City of Lake Charles, and the Imperial Calcasieu Metropolitan Planning Organization formed a coalition to improve transportation options for residents, who identified walkability and bikeability as an important priority for physical activity. The coalition chose Complete Streets because it creates a culture of health by safely and conveniently linking people to schools, parks, and businesses. These initiatives also slow traffic, which reduces pedestrian fatalities.



### Solution

To begin implementing Complete Streets, the partners organized a community training and information session featuring initiative founder, Smart Growth America, to share successes in similar settings. John Robert, former Mayor of Meridian, Mississippi, inspired local leaders in Lake Charles by describing the success of Complete Streets in his city. The training educated key community stakeholders, including local businesses, politicians, and community organizations, along with regional leaders, who learned about Complete Streets for their own parishes and municipalities. The partners also used local print, online, and televised media to inform community members.

*The findings and conclusions in this success story are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position of the funding agencies of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). To learn more about the National Comprehensive Cancer Control Program, visit [www.cdc.gov/cancer/ncccp](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/ncccp).*



NATIONAL  
**Comprehensive  
Cancer Control**  
PROGRAM

Collaborating to Conquer Cancer

## Results

Following the Complete Streets training session, the coalition hosted a Better Blocks event in May 2017. Better Blocks events show residents how Complete Streets will look and function using 1 to 3 blocks as a small pilot example. This event included temporary bike lanes, crosswalks, plantings, and media participation. Because participating families showed support and enjoyed being active during this event, the Lake Charles City Council unanimously approved a Complete Streets ordinance on June 17, 2017. Lake Charles now has over 6 miles of painted bike lanes.

Lake Charles set the example for other regional communities and coalitions on how to adopt and implement their own *Complete Streets* ordinances. Since Lake Charles, more than six communities in the state of Louisiana adopted Complete Streets.



**“Going forward, the Complete Streets ordinance will help make Lake Charles a safer, easier city to lead an active lifestyle.”**

**John O’Donnell**  
Southwest Louisiana Area Health Education Center

## Future Directions

Lake Charles will continue implementing Complete Streets to improve access to safe transportation for everyone, regardless of age, ability, or mode of transportation. In the coming years, the City Council plans to add more striped bike lanes and pedestrian- and wheelchair-friendly crosswalks and sidewalks. It will work with partners to continue to implement healthy policies that protect residents from cancer by encouraging active living, healthy eating, and a smoke-free lifestyle. The Louisiana Health Care Commission, a statewide partner, has even begun counting the number of Complete Streets ordinances as a measure of success and continues to promote the intervention in other communities.

## Your Involvement is Key

You can help make your community a safe, fun, and convenient place to be physically active, which reduces your risk for cancer. Try walking or biking to the local store or park. If you encounter any barriers, such as unsafe sidewalks, crosswalks, or parks, you can get involved with your local comprehensive cancer control program. For more information about this coalition and its cancer control efforts, visit <http://louisianacancer.org/> or <http://healthierswla.com/>.

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1. <https://stateofobesity.org/states/la/>
2. Steele CB, Thomas CC, Henley SJ, et al. *Vital Signs: Trends in Incidence of Cancers Associated with Overweight and Obesity – United States, 2005-2014*. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2017; 66:1052-1058. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6639e1>.
3. <https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/pa-health/index.htm>