

# Colorado Communities Create Safe Physical Environments for People to Be Active

by: Cate Townley, Built Environment Specialist

## SUMMARY

The Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment (CDPHE) has made it possible for the local health departments across the state to be better informed about built environment concepts to improve and make communities safer for residents to be physically active. CDPHE provides local governments with technical assistance on how to integrate health into long-term plans for land use. Once established, these plans could help create environments that support physical activity across Colorado cities, towns, and counties.



## CHALLENGE

Colorado was the eighth healthiest state in the nation, according to America's Health Rankings 2014. Yet, nearly 6 in 10 adults in Colorado are overweight or obese. People with obesity are at increased risk of many serious diseases or health conditions that include high blood pressure, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes. Regular physical activity such as brisk walking or biking can help prevent obesity and reduce the risks of these and other chronic diseases.

Unfortunately, some Colorado residents, especially those in low-income or rural areas, do not feel the physical environments in their communities are safe to walk, bike, or jog. Studies show that improving built environments such as the layout and design of a community's streets, sidewalks, and infrastructure—through joint land use and transportation planning, policies, and practices—can support and increase physical activity.

## YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

To learn more about Colorado's built environment initiatives, visit <http://bit.ly/2azB9zp>. This project is supported by the State Public Health Actions to Prevent and Control Diabetes, Heart Disease, Obesity, and Associated Risk Factors and Promote School Health cooperative agreement (DP13-1305).

*"Active transportation is an integral part of the Metro Vision plan draft. The plan also envisions a region that supports healthy and active choices, and a region with better air quality, with growth in active transportation as a means to those ends."*

- Jennifer Schaufele, executive director, DRCOG

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## SOLUTION

CDPHE supports local health departments in their efforts to improve sidewalks and bike lanes, and make spaces safer so that people can be more active. The state health department provides local health departments with educational resources and technical assistance on built environment concepts. By creating strong partnerships with multiple organizations, CDPHE plans to reach more communities—ultimately providing more residents with increased access to safe environments for physical activity.

## RESULTS

As an example of this work in 2016, CDPHE partnered with Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG)—a planning organization that creates guidelines on transportation and mobility—to help inform Denver region's Metro Vision 2040 plan. Metro Vision is the region's long-range plan for land use, growth, and development. Through this partnership, CDPHE provides guidance on built environments. This guidance can be used by local health departments as they make decisions about land use planning and development. Once complete, this plan could provide best practice strategies on built environment to more than 9 counties and 47 municipalities, potentially reaching 2.7 million Colorado residents. Denver region's Metro Vision plan is approaching final approval and will be available to all counties by the end of 2016.

U.S. Department of Health and Human  
Services  
Centers for Disease Control and  
Prevention  
NCCDPHP

### Contact CDC

<http://www.cdc.gov/cdc-info/requestform.html>

### Web site

<http://nccd.cdc.gov/nccdsuccessstories/>

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 or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

## SUSTAINING SUCCESS

CDPHE will continue to build partnerships with community organizations across the state. The health department is also creating stronger partnerships with other state government agencies to help inform those agencies about the public health need for access to safe areas for physical activity. CDPHE also works with local health departments across the state to set up walk audits with community members. Walk audits help communities assess safe spaces for people to be physically active. Results can be shared with local leaders to help improve streets, sidewalks, crosswalks, and other physical environments. With these efforts, CDPHE aims to increase access to safe physical environments for all Colorado residents.

National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion  
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