

Communities Across Washington State Commit to Safe, Active Streets for All

by: James Kisse

SUMMARY

From 2014 to 2016, the Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) program helped 21 cities, 2 counties, and 1 tribe in Washington State, learn how to make their communities safer and more active through better street design. Key partners—led by the Washington State Department of Health (DOH)—included the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and Transportation Improvement Board (TIB). The organizations partnered with community leaders, in mostly rural areas, to design strategies that increase access to physical activity.



CHALLENGE

In 2013, only 56% of adults living in Washington State were aerobically active for 150 minutes or more each week according to Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System data. Lack of regular physical activity can increase a person's risk for a number of serious health conditions including heart disease, obesity, and type 2 diabetes. Some adults might be aware of these health risks, but may not be physically active because of a lack of access to places where they

can safely walk, bike, run, or otherwise be physically active in their communities. Common barriers to physical activity—for low-income and rural populations in particular—include unsafe neighborhood and traffic conditions, poor access to parks and recreational facilities, and long commutes with few transportation choices.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

For more information about Washington's HEAL program, visit <http://bit.ly/2aXCuPi>. 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).

"Through these educational efforts, we have learned the purpose of Complete Streets policies. Not only does it bring safer paths for our children and community members, it brings opportunities we had never considered."

*- Shoalwater Bay Tribe,
Washington State*

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SOLUTION

To address these barriers, DOH promoted the HEAL program to community organizations across the state to make access to physical activity safer for everyone. HEAL aims to build healthy communities through policy, system, and environmental improvements. The program helped to inform community leaders about complete streets concepts and other strategies that can improve access to physical activity. Complete streets are designed to allow users of all ages, abilities, and modes of transportation to safely move throughout a city. Features might include protected bike lanes, wider sidewalks, safe crossings, better bus stop placements, and traffic-calming measures such as narrower travel lanes.

RESULTS

DOH, WSDOT, and TIB provided technical assistance and training to all 21 cities, 2 counties, and 1 tribe interested in becoming safer and more physically active through policy, system, and environmental improvements. Of those areas, at least 12 cities, 1 county, and 1 tribe (all in rural or tribal areas of Washington State) have set up complete streets policies or ordinances made possible by the HEAL complete streets programs. By taking this step, these cities, county, and tribe, ensure that streets in their communities follow design guidelines that enable safe access for all users. This also means that approximately 70,000 residents now have increased opportunities for walking, biking, and other forms of physical activity.

U.S. Department of Health and Human
Services
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Prevention
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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

Moving forward, DOH, WSDOT, and TIB plan to provide technical assistance and training about complete streets to four or more cities and the Palouse region of Washington State. The state's \$106 million transportation budget for 2016 includes funding for Complete Streets. DOH has also partnered with Feet First—a local organization working to educate area schools about Safe Routes to Schools planning and programming.

National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
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