



Taking It to the (Complete) Streets: Michigan's Road to Fight Obesity

The road was very clear. In 2009, as the state with the 9th highest rate of obesity, Michigan had much work to do. In trying to determine what path to take, the Michigan Department of Community Health created a five-year strategic plan to reduce childhood obesity in Michigan. One of its first initiatives? A statewide effort to address Complete Streets.

Complete Streets is part of a national approach to prevent and control obesity by creating communities with more physical activity options. Public space is set aside so children and adults may safely walk and bike for recreation and for transportation. Pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and public transportation users of all ages and abilities are able to safely move along and across a "complete street."

A statewide coalition was convened to identify and discuss projects and supports that had been successful in addressing childhood obesity in other states. This coalition, known as the Healthy Kids, Healthy Michigan coalition, represents more than 120 organizations from across the state that are committed to reducing obesity in children. The Healthy Kids, Healthy Michigan coalition consists of representatives from government, public and private sectors, school districts, health care and non-profit organizations. The Healthy Kids, Healthy Michigan coalition chose six initiatives for year one of Michigan's focus, with a statewide Complete Streets initiative being one of the highest priorities.

The Healthy Kids, Healthy Michigan coalition collaborated with other state agencies and stakeholders to determine what needed to be done to implement a complete streets project. The Michigan Department of Community Health assisted with background research on Complete Streets initiatives, including literature reviews, landscape assessments, and environmental scans. After deliberating on the research, Healthy Kids, Healthy Michigan decided to move ahead on a Complete Streets initiative and drafted a white paper explaining the need for action.

The funding, education, promotion and training provided by the Department of Community Health at the local level raised awareness as statewide efforts were underway. Community members who witnessed the effects of local Complete Streets ordinances urged their legislators to support the Complete Streets measure. With support from their constituents, Michigan policymakers introduced and adopted a Complete Streets resolution.

This two-layered approach led to a heightened momentum. Community members made their presence known throughout the legislative hearing process, with standing-room-only sessions and hundreds of letters of support. "To take on a cause that could really affect the safety and health of residents and see that many people showing support really got the attention of legislators," said Lisa Grost, a public health consultant at the Michigan Department of Community Health.



Thirty-eight Complete Streets policies have been implemented throughout the state of Michigan and more than **two million residents** are living in a community with a Complete Streets resolution or ordinance.



After two years of collaboration, the hard work paid off. On August 1, 2010, the Complete Streets legislation was passed. Under this legislation, the Michigan Department of Transportation will be required to consider all legal users of the roads, from public transportation riders and motorists, to bicyclists and pedestrians. All ages and abilities of the population will be considered in all phases of project planning for transportation projects. The Michigan Department of Transportation will work with counties and local communities to incorporate Complete Streets elements into existing projects across the state, and they will lead a Complete Streets Advisory Council that will report directly to the governor on a regular basis to share their successes and their challenges.

Healthy Kids, Healthy Michigan continues to collaborate with the Michigan Department of Transportation and others as they grow their efforts to combat childhood obesity, and the Michigan Department of Community Health will continue to support local health departments as they expand their initiatives to promote physical activity and other healthy behaviors within communities. Thirty-eight policies have been implemented on a local level throughout the state and more than two million people live in a Michigan community with a Complete Streets resolution or ordinance.

As Michigan continues down its path to reduce childhood obesity and increase the level of physical activity among its youth, it also continues to lead the way nationally in Complete Streets policies. The Michigan Complete Streets initiative was recognized as the Winning Campaign of the Year by the national Alliance for Biking and Walking. It may be a long road to reduce childhood obesity, but Michigan is taking it one step—and street—at a time.



For more information, please contact:

Gwen Imes

Michigan Department of Community Health
Email: imesg@michigan.gov

Christina Harvey

Michigan Department of Community Health
Email: harveyC3@michigan.gov