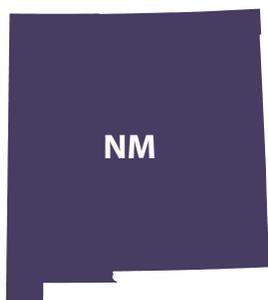


Public Health Practice Stories from the Field



Physicians Write a Prescription to Get Up and Get Moving in New Mexico Prescription Trails Program

6 of every 10

Chronic diseases account for 60% of deaths in New Mexico

5 communities

Information on finding high-quality walking environments in five communities was provided

90%

The vast majority (90%) of providers prescribed one walk per day in the evaluation pilot

30–39 minutes

Physicians most commonly recommended patients walk for about half an hour

Obesity is epidemic in the United States today. Approximately one in three adults and one in six children are obese. Obesity is linked to many chronic diseases, such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes.

In New Mexico, 6 out of every 10 deaths can be attributed to chronic diseases (New Mexico Vital Records and Health Statistics, April 2004). Nearly 9% of adults in the state are currently diagnosed with diabetes, and 80% of them are overweight or obese ([New Mexico diabetes prevalence table](#)). Nearly half (47%) of adults in New Mexico are not getting the recommended amount of physical activity ([2009 BRFSS data](#)).

The health problems that result from an indoor, sedentary lifestyle require action from all sectors of society. Parks and public lands are underused resources that positively affect health and health outcomes.

In 1999, New Mexico engaged a diverse group of partners to develop the Prescription Trails program, which uses parks and green spaces to encourage physical activity. Initial partners included the Albuquerque Alliance for Active Living, American Heart and Stroke Association, National Park Service's Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program, New Mexico Department of Health, and state health plans.

The Prescription Trails pilot program is geared to chronic disease patients who are usually sedentary or are seeking places to be active and have fun at the same time.

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What We Did

Prescription Trails trained health care professionals to use special prescription pads and other tools to help promote healthy lifestyle changes for their patients. To ensure patients engage in appropriate levels of physical activity, health care providers first assess their patients for readiness to start or maintain a walking program and then write tailored prescriptions based on each patient's current physical condition.

Along with a walking prescription, each patient receives a field guide developed by Prescription Trails that provides information on safe and accessible walking environments in their area. The [Prescription Trails website](#) highlights parks and open space trails in five communities: Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Roswell, Alamogordo, and Las Cruces. Trails are listed by zip codes or city neighborhoods, making it easy for people to find walking options in different areas of the city. The Prescription Trails website also contains a trail assessment tool that was created in partnership with the National Park Service and is available for public use and replication.

What We Accomplished

SPrescription Trails won the 2010 International MarCom gold award for the Albuquerque Walking Guide. The program was also spotlighted at a listening session for the America's Great Outdoors Initiative.

An evaluation of the pilot program found that

- Health care providers felt the training on how to use the prescription pads and walking guide used their time efficiently.
- Providers enjoyed using the prescription pads and walking guide, and planned to continue using them outside of the project's evaluation period.
- More than 90% of providers recommended one walk per day, with 30–39 minutes the most commonly prescribed number of minutes per walk.
- The most commonly identified barriers to physical activity included access to walking trails, transportation, time, safety, and weather constraints.
- Additional partnerships, such as working with local parks and recreation departments, police departments, and neighborhood watch groups, could potentially address some of these barriers.

What We Learned

By promoting parks and walking as a prescription for health, the New Mexico program learned the importance of

- Finding a physician champion to advocate for clean environments for a healthy population
- Engaging ancillary health care professionals, such as physicians assistants and nurse practitioners, who spend more time with patients
- Changing the public's perception of parks as only sports fields or playgrounds
- Keeping parks maintained so that more communities can participate in Prescription Trails
- Engaging businesses to help support parks and increase community involvement
- Enlisting volunteers to access parks and build community involvement and ownership

For more stories, visit

www.cdc.gov/stltpublichealth/phpracticestories

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