



Walkable community design and its impact on community health and prosperity.

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**Comments from America Walks
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It is widely documented that where a person lives as demonstrated by their zip code significantly predicts their life expectancy and quality of life. In part, this prediction is a result of the community design that provides individuals with access to components of a healthy lifestyle, including regular routine physical activity, opportunities for social engagement, and nearby healthy foods. In addition to individual health, community design and the built environment can also support community health through thriving local economies and sustainable environmental improvements.

The links between community design, community health, and prosperity make a strong case for investing in prevention and re-shaping how we use our health care dollars. Health care cannot be simply about treating illnesses and diseases that exist but needs to also incorporate that which helps prevents illness and promotes wellness for all.

Walking and walkable communities is critical piece to creating healthy, active, and engaged communities. It is possible to achieve better walking conditions in neighborhoods and realize the health benefits of walkable communities. America Walks has found that training local community leaders and activists in the skills needed to develop feasible walking action plans and systems analysis of pedestrian concerns can result in improved walking conditions, stronger community commitment and engagement with healthy behaviors, and an overall better sense of well-being. These local leaders, empowered by America Walks through programs like the Walking Collee, Road to Zero, and online webinar series, go on to create change throughout their communities as well as spurring on local, state, and national action by coming together and inspiring others.

The amount of investment needed to realize change in communities is not much. America Walks has seen how small investments in specific community engagement opportunities can increase the interests and enthusiasm needed to promote more walking and create a community norm that embraces and supports walking. Over the past 4 years, America Walks has received over 2500 community requests for small grants to support these efforts. They are happening in all 50 states and many of the territories. Each of these projects is an opportunity for a community to realize a healthier future.

Physical activity is the magic pill for improving health and preventing chronic diseases. Communities designed to support more walking provide a well-established pathway to increase physical activity levels. Increased physical activity will decrease chronic disease and the health care costs associated with them.

Reports:

<http://americawalks.org/community-change-agents-walk-on/>

<http://americawalks.org/walkingcollege/>

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