



Promoting Health and Cost Control in States:

How States Can Improve Community Health & Well-being Through Policy Change

Complete Streets

KEY TAKEAWAYS

What are Complete Streets Policies?

- Complete Streets is an approach to transportation that addresses the needs of all road users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders, regardless of their age or ability.

How do Complete Streets Policies Improve Health?

- Complete Streets policies strengthen transportation systems, promote physical activity, and improve health outcomes associated with chronic diseases.

What is the Economic Impact of Complete Streets Policies?

- They decrease obesity-related diseases and can save millions in healthcare costs.
- These policies are usually funded within existing budgets, and do not incur extra costs.

Background

Physical inactivity and obesity are among the most significant health problems in the United States. Children and adults alike are not engaging in enough physical activity throughout their day. Altering public spaces and their surrounding infrastructure can create opportunities for people to increase their level of physical activity and adopt a more active lifestyle.

Most U.S. streets are currently designed to maximize vehicle speed and flow of traffic, which leads to roads that are not safe for pedestrians and cyclists. Complete Streets is an approach to transportation that addresses the needs of all road users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders, regardless of their age or ability. Complete Streets policies make places more walkable, bike-friendly, and more connected to parks and public transportation. Such policies can create mobility options for communities, improve pedestrian safety, and boost local economic activity by increasing foot traffic for local businesses.

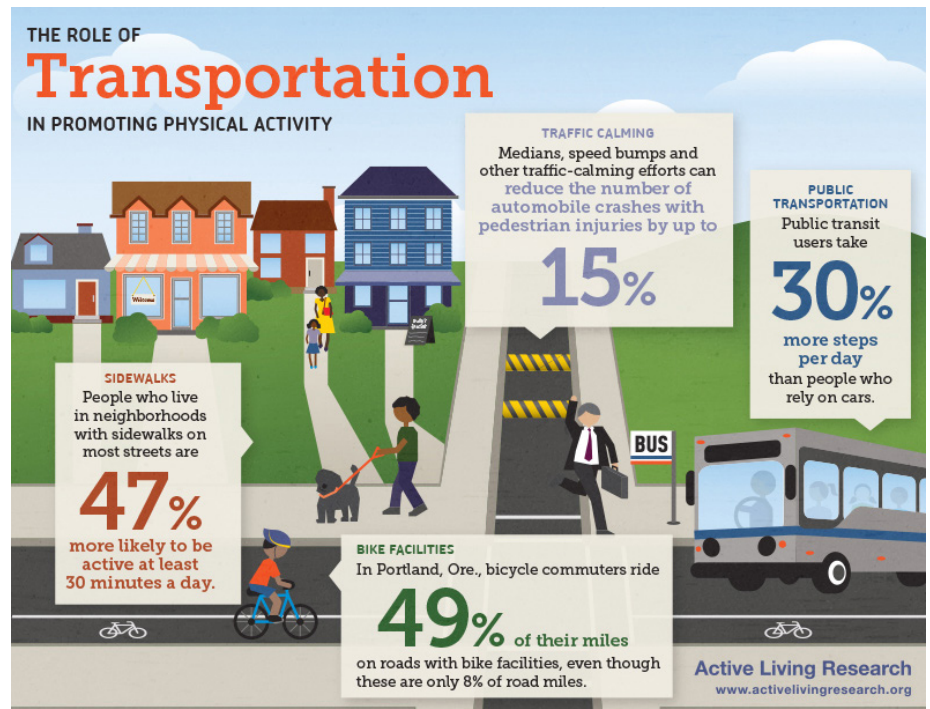


What States Can Do

States can enact Complete Streets legislation to improve connectivity to transportation systems, promote physical activity, encourage biking and walking, and make places more pedestrian-friendly. As of July 1, 2020, 23 states and the District of Columbia have adopted Complete Streets policies with mandatory requirements; 7 of those states and the District of Columbia, have policies that include mandatory requirements with clear action steps and intents.¹ There is variation across state policies including differences in the policy type, the entity tasked with implementing the policy, reporting requirements, and funding.² States can adopt various street designs that reflect multiple uses so they are safe for all commuters, including pedestrians, bikers and motorcyclists. States can also support complementary policies that improve connectivity and create more walkable and livable communities.

Increasing Pedestrian Safety and Connectivity Improves Physical Activity

It is well established that people who are physically active tend to live longer and have a lower risk for chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers.³ But, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, only about one in five adults meet the recommended guidelines for weekly physical activity, and fewer than three in ten high school students get at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day.⁴ Physical activity trends are also linked to individuals' education and socioeconomic status. Adults with higher educational attainment and adults whose family incomes are above the federal poverty line are more likely to meet the recommended physical



Source: Active Living Research⁹

activity guidelines compared to adults with less education and adults with family income at or near the poverty line.⁵ People with lower-incomes often need to work long hours or multiple jobs, which limit their leisure-time to engage in physical activity.

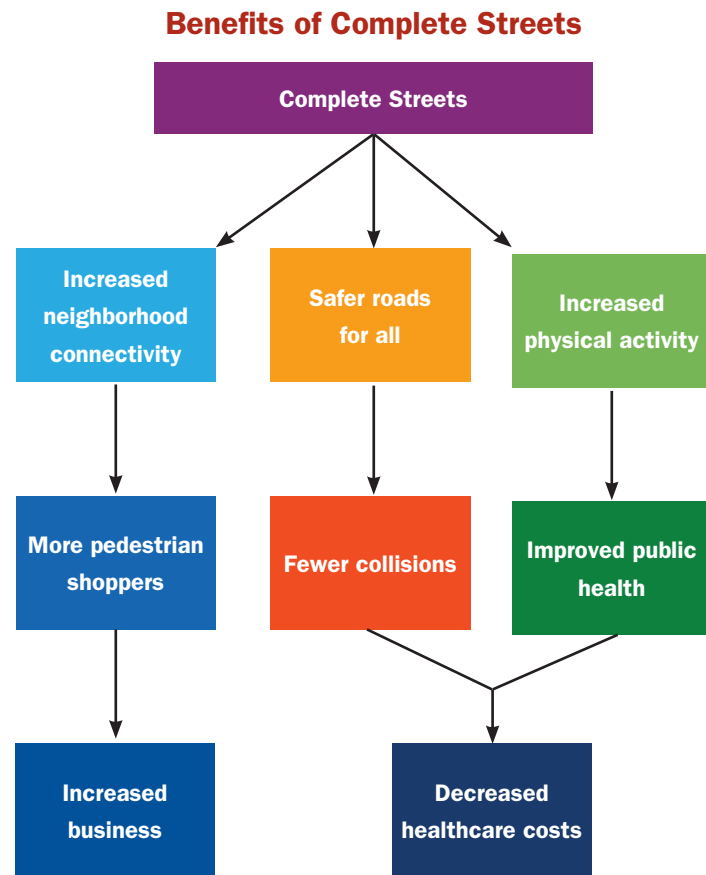
Research has found that Complete Streets policies increase connectivity and rates of physical activity.⁶ Improved

bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, such as installing bike lanes and walking trails, promote active transportation.⁷ Residing in a neighborhood with more streetlights and bike paths can lead to higher levels of walking, increased physical activity, and lower rates of obesity. In addition, these design elements can reduce crime and stress, improve green space, and increase a neighborhood's sense of community.⁸

Complete Streets Policy Can Reduce Healthcare Costs and Promote Economic Growth

The annual national healthcare costs associated with inadequate physical activity is an estimated \$117 billion.¹⁰ Adopting Complete Streets policies to alter public spaces and their surrounding infrastructure can promote physical activity and help reduce the healthcare costs associated with a lack of physical activity. Additionally, this policy improves safety by reducing vehicle collision related injuries and deaths.¹¹

In addition to savings in healthcare costs, Complete Streets policies can benefit a community economically. Increased accessibility and safety, along with improved aesthetic appeal of an area, can draw more pedestrians to a business area, stimulating its economic growth.¹² Furthermore, financing Complete Streets does not require additive costs as such policies are often developed as part of existing budgets. Adopting Complete Streets approaches would typically require a shift in planning and development rather than identifying an additional stream of funding.



COMMUNICATING THE IMPORTANCE AND IMPACT OF COMPLETE STREETS POLICIES

Policymakers

- Adopting a Complete Streets approach to transportation policy can improve levels of physical activity, create opportunities for residents to be active, and decrease their risk of developing chronic diseases such as heart diseases, diabetes, and cancer.
- Complete Streets policies make roads safer for all road users, increases connectivity, makes communities safer, and increases foot traffic for local businesses.

- Financing Complete Streets would typically not require an increase in government spending, but rather a shift in planning and development.

Public Health Professionals

- Complete Streets make being active easier by increasing walkability, improving pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, and decreasing barriers to physical activity.
- Adults with lower incomes often work long hours or multiple jobs, leaving them with less time to engage in leisure-time physical activity.

Complete Streets policies can create new opportunities for active transport and improve access to green spaces.

Consumers

- Complete Streets is an approach to transportation that addresses the needs of all road users, provides mobility options, and makes communities more pedestrian-friendly.
- Complete Streets policies offer new opportunities for residents to engage in physical activity and lead an active lifestyle, and increase a neighborhood's sense of community.

Interested in learning more about Complete Streets and other evidence-based policies? Visit the PHACCS website to read the full report and other policy briefs for our 13 recommended policies.

Endnotes

- 1 "Complete Streets." In: The Policy Surveillance Program, 2020. <https://lawatlas.org/datasets/complete-streets> (accessed August 20, 2020)
- 2 Minn. Stat. Ann. § 174.75.
- 3 "Facts about Physical Activity." In: *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014*. <https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/data/facts.htm> (accessed December 20, 2018).
- 4 "Facts about Physical Activity." In: *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014*. <https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/data/facts.htm> (accessed December 20, 2018).
- 5 "Facts about Physical Activity." In: *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014*. <https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/data/facts.htm> (accessed December 20, 2018).
- 6 "Physical Activity: Built Environment Approaches Combining Transportation System Interventions with Land Use and Environmental Design." In: *Community Preventive Services Task Force, 2017*. <https://www.thecommunityguide.org/sites/default/files/assets/PA-Built-Environments.pdf> (accessed December 20, 2018).
- 7 Lowry M and Loh TH. "Quantifying Bicycle Network Connectivity." *Preventive Medicine*, 95(Suppl): S134–S140, 2017.
- 8 "Physical Activity." In: *The Community Guide*. https://www.thecommunityguide.org/topic/physical-activity?field_recommendation_tid=All&items_per_page=All (accessed December 20, 2018).
- 9 Wilson A. "Infographic: The Role of Transportation in Promoting Physical Activity." In: *Active Living Research* (July 18, 2012) <https://activelivingresearch.org/blog/2012/07/infographic-role-transportation-promoting-physical-activity> (accessed January 1, 2019)
- 10 Carlson SA, Fulton JE, Pratt M, Yang Z, Adams EK. Inadequate physical activity and health care expenditures in the United States. *Prog Cardiovasc Dis*. 2015;57:315-323.
- 11 Moore T and Taylor P. *White Paper on the Economics of Complete Streets*. Portland, OR: ECONorthwest, August 23, 2013. <https://sccrtc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/2013-complete-streets-whitepaper.pdf> (accessed December 20, 2018).
- 12 Nicholls J, Cannon S, Lindquist K, and Reeves P. WA-RD 780.1 *Washington's Complete Streets and Main Street Highways: Case Study Resource*. Olympia, WA: Washington State Department of Transportation, November 2011. https://www.wsdot.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2015/02/24/ATP_WA-Complete-Streets.pdf (accessed December 20, 2018).