


The UMass Worcester Prevention Research Center, located at UMass Medical School in Worcester, MA, is a member of the CDC's Prevention Research Center (PRC) network. Our work promotes healthy lifestyles through increased opportunities for physical activity, healthy eating and healthy weight. For more information, visit: [www.umassmed.edu/prc](http://www.umassmed.edu/prc)

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### Overview

Everyday walking and bicycling offer sustainable ways for people to meet recommended physical activity levels. Making communities more walk- and bicycle-friendly may require changing land use and transportation policy and systems. Local health departments that want to increase physical activity in their communities need to engage in these areas. A first step to designing programs to involve more departments is learning what factors make departments more likely to be engaged.

### Main Questions

- What types of health departments are involved with healthy community design, active transportation, and recreational facility access policy?
- What performance improvement activities do these health departments report?
- What types of collaborations do these health departments report?

### Study

This study used data from 490 health departments that answered the 2013 National Profile of Local Departments conducted by the National Association of County and City Health Officials. Departments reported policy activities in three areas: urban design/land use, active transportation, and access to recreation facilities. They also answered questions about their size and other characteristics, their performance improvement activities, and their collaborations with other health departments and community partners.

### The Bottom Line

Local health departments reported low involvement in the three areas of community physical activity policy. Involvement varied by characteristics such as department size, performance improvement activities, and collaborations with other health departments and community partners. Departments that are larger or have more resources reported more involvement overall.

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[www.pedbikeimages.org/Laura\\_Sandt](http://www.pedbikeimages.org/Laura_Sandt)

### Spotlight on Results

- Health departments reported similar participation in policy on urban design/land use (25%), active transportation (16%) and recreational facility access (23%).
- Health departments that serve larger cities, have a Community Health Improvement Plan, use the Community Guide regularly, and collaborate with partners on land use were up to three times more likely to be involved in these types of policy.

### Call for Action

Smaller local health departments and those with fewer resources may need assistance to be more engaged in community physical activity policy. Encouraging health departments to become accredited is an important step. Creating competencies for health departments in land use and transportation may help health departments focus limited resources.

### Source

Goins KV, Ye J, Leep CJ, Robin N, Lemon SC. Local Health Department Engagement in Community Physical Activity Policy. *Am J Prev Med*. 2015 Sep 22. pii:S0749-3797(15)00360-8. doi: 10.1016/j.amepre.2015.06.033.