

Community Transformation Grant Built Environment

The state of Montana received a Community Transformation Grant to promote healthy lifestyles and communities, especially among populations experiencing the greatest burden of chronic disease. This grant will help improve health, reduce health disparities and lower healthcare costs. In Montana 61% of adults are overweight or obese, and just over 21% of Montana adolescents (grades 9-12) are overweight or obese. Obesity is a key risk factor for heart disease, type 2 diabetes, certain cancers, and high blood pressure. Physical activity is an essential component in the fight against obesity. Increased use of active transportation and recreation will reduce the risk of chronic diseases caused by overweight, obesity and inactivity. Obesity is higher in rural communities where walking and biking rates are lower and walking and biking infrastructure is less developed.

The overall *Community Transformation Plan* outlines the development and implementation of six activities by 2016. One of these six activities addresses the connection between public health and community design. The goal of this activity is to create or enhance access to places for Montanans to be physically active. There are numerous evidence-based strategies communities can choose to accomplish this goal including community-scale and street-scale design and land use policies that support active living. Research shows that a comprehensive approach is essential in improving community design to enhance walking and biking.

Project Aims	Increase adoption of evidence-based active living and active transportation standards by local governments to create or enhance access to places for Montanans to be physically active.
Project Description	Our 5-year objective will expand the healthy and safe physical environment in Montana's 20 largest communities. We will work to see these communities adopt written active living/active transportation standards by providing technical assistance, mentorship and resources.
Current Stakeholders	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Montana's 20 largest communities 2. Lewis and Clark City-County Health Department (mentor county) 3. RiverStone Health (Yellowstone City-County Health Department—mentor county)
Measuring Success	By September 29, 2016, increase the number of Montana residents living in communities with active living/active transportation standards in place from the current 236,428 to 432,462.
Accomplishments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contract with two mentor counties • Active Transportation Local Policy Survey distributed to 16 communities • "Readiness tool" developed to determine which communities most ready and interested in working toward policy and environmental change. • Active Community Environments advisors identified.
Challenges	In spite of the growing presence of some strong local champions, there are still many elected leaders and stakeholders in Montana communities that are not yet fully aware of the connection between community health and community design. Again, with a few notable exceptions, even Montana's largest communities (which are still defined 'rural' by most-used nationally-used measures) have few standards in place to support active living and few local government staff with the time or expertise to develop these standards. Local government budgets are very tight and one currently common perception is that enacting active living standards will cost too much money.
Next Steps	Develop and adapt existing resources that will be helpful to Montana's local governments; identify the communities most interested and ready to work on project goals; identify local "champions" to work on these issues; provide technical assistance and mentorship to communities to adopt new standards supportive of active living.

For more information, contact:

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