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Making Strides: 2024 State Report Cards

HOW TO USE YOUR STATE'S REPORT CARD ON WALKING,
BIKING, AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The 2024 Making Strides state report cards evaluate each state on 26 indicators spanning four core topic areas that focus on key areas for state action to promote and support walking, biking, and physical activity. The state report cards help us understand at a glance how each state is doing to create and design communities that support and promote physical activity for kids and adults, and where there is room for improvement, making it easier to take action in support of healthier more active communities.

WHY STATE SUPPORT FOR WALKING, BICYCLING, AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY MATTERS

Physical Activity Matters

- > Studies have shown that physical activity is important for everyone.¹
- > For children, the benefits of physical activity include improved attention and memory, reduced risk of depression, improved aerobic fitness, and reduced risk of chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes.²
- > For adults, physical activity includes immediate benefits such as improved sleep quality and reduced blood pressure and long-term benefits such as lower risk of depression, heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes, lower risk of some cancers, improved bone health, and others.³
- > More walking, bicycling, and physical activity can also provide an increased sense of community and less social isolation, higher cognitive functioning, less air pollution and fewer climate changing emissions.⁴

Americans Aren't Getting Enough Physical Activity

- > Based on self-reported data (which often over-estimates healthy behavior) from 2018, 54 percent of American adults meet the aerobic component of the physical activity guidelines and 24 percent meet the recommended levels of overall physical activity.^{6,5}
- > Less than one-quarter (24 percent) of children 6 to 17 years of age participate in 60 minutes of physical activity every day. Physical activity rates were higher for boys than girls, and higher for white students than for African American and Hispanic students.⁷
- > There are differences in rates of physical activity by race and by location. Non-Hispanic Black adults (30.0 percent) and Hispanic adults (32.1 percent) reported the lowest prevalence of physical activity outside of work. Regionally, states in the South (27.5 percent) had the lowest prevalence of physical activity, followed by the Midwest (25.2 percent), Northeast (24.7 percent), and West (21.0 percent).⁸ These disparities are associated with differences in neighborhood availability of health-promoting features such as sidewalks⁹, parks¹⁰, bicycle lanes¹¹, daily high-quality physical education¹², and others.

MAKING STRIDES: STATE REPORT CARDS ON WALKING, BICYCLING, AND ACTIVE KIDS AND COMMUNITIES

The new 2024 report, [Making Strides: State Report Cards on Walking, Bicycling, and Active Kids and Communities](#), provides a detailed explanation of how the states were graded; an overview of the research that supports walking, bicycling, and physical activity as ways to improve health; a discussion of the rationale for state-level report cards; and reflections on support for physical activity in different regions and our country as a whole.

Walking, Biking, Public Transportation, and Parks Help Americans Get the Physical Activity They Need for Health

- > Walking and bicycling are key ways in which people can get physical activity as part of their daily lives. For example, almost one-third of transit users get their entire recommended amount of physical activity just by walking to and from transit stops.^{9,13} Conversely, traveling by car is a more sedentary behavior¹³, which is associated with chronic disease and premature death.¹⁰
- > A review of the literature finds that people living in places

that are more supportive of active transportation are more likely to be physically active and have a lower risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer.¹⁵

Access to places for physical activity, such as parks, playgrounds, community centers, and other recreational facilities, increase the likelihood of youth and adults being physically active. Studies show that people who live closer to places for physical activity, like parks, are more likely to visit and be physically active more often than those who live further away.¹⁶

Steps for Using Your State's Report Card

Now that you have your state's report card, what can you do?

1. Ask these questions:

- > **How did my state score?** Look at your state's overall score and grade, as well as the scores and grades for each core topic area.
- > **Where is my state doing well?** In many cases, individual states have focused efforts and resources in one or more of the core topic areas. Recognize areas where the state scored well. Every state has made some commitment to healthier, active communities. If your state has a policy or plan in place in one of the topic areas, speak with the responsible agency to understand how it is being implemented and see if improvements can be made.
- > **Where can my state improve?** Take a look at the areas where your state scored poorly. For ideas on how to boost your score using new opportunities in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, consider this factsheet for [State Departments of Transportation](#) or this factsheet for [Champions and Partners](#).

2. Focus on one or two specific areas

Think about those areas that may have wins, where there is fairly easy potential for change. Consider areas where more significant efforts will need to be made to effect change, but where the change will have widespread benefits.



3. Identify and connect with partners who may be working on the same or similar issues.

Change generally requires collaboration. Who might those partners be? Think about the following groups:

- > Hospital/health system
- > American Heart Association
- > American Cancer Society
- > American Medical Association
- > Local or state YMCAs
- > Local Boys & Girls Clubs
- > School associations
- > Faith-based organizations
- > Community coalitions

4. Make change!

Of course, making change is actually a multi-step process. Changing policies and creating healthier communities can often require forming a coalition, identifying decisionmakers, crafting a proposal, and creating pressure and momentum for change. While the steps to successfully change policies, funding, and practices will vary based on the topic area and level of government, using the activities and strategies below will support your work for healthy, vibrant communities.



IDEAS FOR ACTIVITIES AND STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE CHANGE

- > Bring media attention to the issue. Undertake an awareness campaign that focuses on areas where the state could improve and specific actions that the state could take.
- > Use [social media](#) to spread your message widely.
- > Engage local elected officials to encourage changes at the state level. Develop a mayors' sign-on letter or a municipal resolution to voice official local support for your issue.
- > Speak with staff from the state departments working most closely on your topic of interest to understand potential for supportive administrative changes.
- > If your state is developing a bicycle or pedestrian plan, Safe Routes to School plan, physical activity plan, or other state-level plan, determine how you can participate and work to include specific goals and objectives that support healthier, active communities.
- > If there has been success in improving one area, think about working with partners to expand efforts to promote change in a related area. For example, if your state recently adopted a Complete Streets policy, but scored poorly in the Federal and State Active Transportation Funding section, reach out to Complete Streets champions to begin to address funding.
- > Engage youth in developing a local or state campaign to champion changes they are most concerned with.
- > If working toward state change feels out of reach, think about how local action can spur statewide change
- > Work with partners to adopt a local Complete Streets or other policy that supports walking, biking, or physical activity.
- > Work with community members to document and share neighborhood concerns and strengths through a [Photovoice](#) project.



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