

Utah Communities Adopt Plans to Improve Spaces for Residents to Be More Active

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At A Glance

Utah residents across the state now have increased access to active living spaces for walking and biking. The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) collaborated with transportation planning agencies, including the Utah Department of Transportation and metropolitan planning organizations, to build capacity with local health departments to create safe and sustainable walking trails and bike lanes for residents to be more active. The training sessions include educational resources on best practice strategies that improve active living for all.



Public Health Challenge

Approximately 60% of adults in Utah were considered overweight or obese in 2014, according to Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) data. Regular physical activity can help prevent obesity and reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, high blood pressure, or stroke for people with and without obesity. Yet, many Utah residents are not getting enough physical activity. According to 2013 BFRSS data, only 55% of Utah adults met minimum national

guidelines for physical activity (i.e., 150 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity weekly). Although Utah has a reputation for popular outdoor recreation, day-to-day physical activity is often a challenge. Often, communities—especially in rural and low-income areas—do not have walking trails or bike lanes that support safe, interconnected spaces for people to be physically active.

Find Out More

For more information about Utah's active transportation projects, visit <http://choosehealth.utah.gov/your-health/your-community/bike-and-pedestrian-info.php> This

project is supported by the State Public Health Actions to Prevent and Control Diabetes, Heart Disease, Obesity, and Associated Risk Factors and Promote School Health cooperative agreement (DP13-1305).

Active transportation has a huge impact on health. If walking and biking had the proper infrastructure it would slowly become the norm and we would become a healthier nation.

- Karlie Mitchell, Bear River Local Health Department

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Results

Between 2014 and 2016, hundreds of individuals including staff from local health districts, city planners, and community leaders attended UDOH-supported trainings. These trainings promote the integration of transportation systems and other transportation strategies into roadway planning, design, and policies to ensure spaces are safe for all users including bicyclists, pedestrians, transit riders, and motorists. In 2015, 4 complete streets policies were set up, and about 10 new active transportation plans will be effective by the end of 2016. Also, through a collaborative effort, the Active Transportation and Health Summit provided more than 600 attendees with information to support these initiatives.

Approach

UDOH partnered with community organizations and transportation planning agencies across the state to provide local health departments with training to improve active transportation systems. Active transportation plans can help inform future transportation designs for land use. Transportation plans can include components that connect communities through open space systems—such as park trails and bike lanes—to encourage residents to be more physically active in their daily lives. Training topics include using public health data in transportation planning, setting up complete streets policies, and conducting walkability assessments.

What's Next

UDOH will continue to build partnerships with community organizations and planning agencies across the state to address chronic disease and obesity. UDOH will also continue to provide local health departments, city planners, and engineers with training to help inform transportation plans and improve physical environments for Utah residents. Through these joint efforts, the health department aims to create safe, interconnected spaces that enable residents in rural and urban communities to lead healthier lives