

## Community Design Can Encourage Physical Activity

Recently, the Trust for America's Health came out with the report, *Fas in Fat: How Obesity Policies are Failing in America*. The report outlines the prevalence of overweight and obesity throughout the United States, as well as physical inactivity and chronic conditions associated with obesity. Interestingly, Minnesota has the lowest rate of physical inactivity (15.4%) , while falling in the middle of the pack for overweight/obesity rates (61.3%).

The report details barriers preventing people from getting enough physical activity and evidence based strategies for promoting it. One barrier mentioned is that communities are not designed for physical activity. The report provides recommendations for improving community design to encourage more physical activity and better nutritious eating habits through the following strategies:

- ⇒ Encourage "mixed-use" areas
- ⇒ Examine health impact of new buildings
- ⇒ Building design codes (where design encourages stair use rather than elevators)
- ⇒ Build more sidewalks
- ⇒ Encourage transportation fund use for mass transit and alternatives to highways
- ⇒ Modernize new school-site construction requirements
- ⇒ Provide improved healthy food access in low-income areas

Implementing strategies for improving the built environment can support and encourage more physical activity. Through the updating of comprehensive plans, municipalities can explore which strategies are feasible and realistic to integrate into plans to promote active living and healthier communities.

### FAST FACTS:

- *Nearly 59% of Ramsey County adults are overweight.*
- *An estimated \$495 million were spent during 2000 treating diseases and conditions that would be avoided if all Minnesotans were physically active .*
- *In Ramsey County 21% of adults report no physical activity in the past 30 days.*

*(Sources: 2005 BRFSS Synthetic Estimation Method; 2002 MDH Fact Sheet, Health Care Costs of Physical Inactivity; SMART BRFSS 2005, CDC)*

## 1,000 Benches Provide Pathways to Health, One Step at a Time

Recently, ALRC has been instrumental in creating the 1,000 Benches project. ALRC will facilitate the placement of 1,000 benches made of recycled materials in a series of corridors connecting destinations throughout the County. The corridors will provide a "community path to health, one step at a time" to create a physical environment to encourage walking. ALRC is in the process of completing two pilot projects—located in the City of New Brighton and the Summit-University neighborhood in the City of St Paul. Both communities

have planned upcoming celebrations. **New Brighton Parks and Recreation is hosting a ribbon-cutting on September 25 at 5:00 PM. St Paul is celebrating the Rondo Path to Health October 11 at 4:00 PM.**

The 1,000 Benches project reflects how engaging communities can result in physical infrastructure changes to promote and encourage physical activity—one step at a time. For more information visit our website: [www.activelivingramseycounty.org](http://www.activelivingramseycounty.org).



## Incorporating Active Living in your Community: Health Impact Assessments

Health Impact Assessments (HIAs) are generally defined as a “collection of procedures and tools by which projects, policies, and programs can be evaluated based on their potential effects on the health of a population and the distribution of those effects within the population.” In the Trust for America’s Health report, *How Obesity Policies are Failing America*, one recommendation for encouraging physical activity and better nutrition in the built environment is to utilize HIAs for proposed land use and building projects. HIAs can help decision-makers understand the health consequences of projects and policies they are considering.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention outlines the following steps for an HIA:



New Brighton Parks, Recreation, and Environmental Commission member Ron Meyer and his wife Sharon, enjoying one of the Active Living benches.

- ⇒ **Screening:** identify projects of policies for which HIA would be useful
- ⇒ **Scoping:** identify which health impacts should be

included

- ⇒ **Risk assessment:** identify which people may be affected and how they may be affected
- ⇒ **Reporting:** present the results to decision-makers
- ⇒ **Evaluation:** determine the affect of the HIA on the decision making process

Design for Health offers a few HIA tools focusing specifically on health issues related to community design. For more information on HIAs visit: <http://www.designforhealth.net/techassistance/healthimpact.html>. If interested in utilizing the HIA tool and would like assistance please contact [amber.dallman@co.ramsey.mn.us](mailto:amber.dallman@co.ramsey.mn.us).

**Active Living Ramsey County!**  
2785 White Bear Avenue North  
Suite 350  
Maplewood, MN 55109-1320

*Active Living Ramsey County is a collaborative effort working to create and promote environments that make it safe and convenient for people to integrate physical activity into their daily routines.*

*Do you have suggestions, comments or something to share? Please contact Amber Dallman at [amber.dallman@co.ramsey.mn.us](mailto:amber.dallman@co.ramsey.mn.us) or 651.266.1179 for more information.*



### USEFUL RESOURCES

- ⇒ The Design for Health website bridges the gap between the emerging research based on urban design and healthy living and the questions and priorities of local governments. Information can be found on health and planning, as well as Health Impact Assessments at [www.designforhealth.net](http://www.designforhealth.net).
- ⇒ The Land Use and Health program out of Oakland, CA has produced *General Plans and Zoning: A Toolkit on Land Use and Health*. The toolkit provides examples of model language for comprehensive plans and is available for download at [www.healthyplanning.org](http://www.healthyplanning.org).
- ⇒ For biking and pedestrian design and planning guidance and requirements, and links to city and county websites, see the Mn/DOT bike/pedestrian home page at <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/bike/>.
- ⇒ COMPLETE STREETS are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users. Pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and bus riders of all ages and abilities are able to safely move along and across a complete street. More information can be found at <http://www.completestreets.org/>.

**We're on the web:**  
[activelivingramseycounty.org](http://activelivingramseycounty.org)