

LET'S TALK

Open Spaces for Physical Activity

PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN PROMOTING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND HEALTH FOR PEOPLE OF ALL AGES.

In fact, people who live closer to parks tend to be more physically active. A growing body of evidence shows the links between physical activity and access to, programming in, and maintenance of parks, trails, greenways and indoor recreation facilities, and making sure these places are safe and well-maintained.



Only 1 in 5 Minnesotans live within walking distance of a park.

Children living within 2/3 of a mile from a playground can be 5X more likely to have a healthy weight.

In the U.S., 70% of African American neighborhoods and 81% of Hispanic neighborhoods lack recreation facilities, compared to 38% of white neighborhoods.

THE ENDLESS BENEFITS OF OPEN SPACES

The benefits of a community designed for walking are many and diverse:



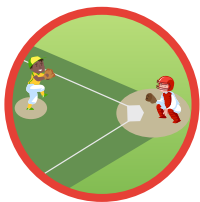
HEALTHY KIDS

Making recreational facilities more accessible in all communities is a critical strategy for increasing physical activity and preventing obesity among children and families.



REDUCED CRIME

Studies show that neighborhoods with barriers to physical activity often have lower-quality sidewalks, fewer parks and greater danger from crime and traffic.



CLOSING THE GAP

Children who live in lower-income communities and communities of color are more likely to be overweight or obese than white children and children from more affluent backgrounds. Access to parks and open spaces in more communities helps close this gap.



RECREATION OPTIONS

Parks and recreation facilities are especially important in rural areas where people live further away from school, work and other common destinations. Safe playgrounds, parks, bike paths, trails and other recreational facilities can offer rural residents opportunities to be physically active, even if they have to drive to them.



REAL STORIES OF MINNESOTANS PULLING TOGETHER

Through Milaca Art in the Park, the Milaca Fine Arts Council converted a vacant lot to an energetic and active place where residents can spend time in downtown Milaca and use the available walking routes throughout the town.

STEPS FOR ACTION

✔ ORGANIZE

Organized park programs and supervision may increase use of parks and playgrounds and may increase physical activity, particularly among youth.

✔ ADVOCATE

Policymakers and advocates can collaborate with schools to establish joint use agreements allowing playing fields, playgrounds and recreation centers to be used by community residents when schools are closed.

✔ TALK WITH OFFICIALS

City planners and local officials can work to build and maintain parks and playgrounds that are safe and attractive for playing, and in close proximity to residential areas. State officials should ensure that state child-care licensing agencies adopt regulations and guidelines that promote safe and adequate play spaces for child-care settings.

Resources:

<http://activelivingresearch.org/designing-active-living-among-children>

<http://activelivingresearch.org/taxonomy/parks-recreation>