



FACTS

Physical Activity Promotion in Parks, Fitness, Recreation, & Sport

Overview

The amount of free time for leisure activity in America has increased, yet this extra time has come in smaller chunks and is often spent in a passive, sedentary manner (eg, interacting with cell phones, videos, TV, web)ⁱ Spending in all areas of the leisure sector has grown at a faster pace than the overall US economy, however growth in areas likely to promote sedentary behavior (such as media and spectator sports) has outpaced growth in areas associated with physical activity (such as sports equipment and fitness facility memberships).ⁱ The end result is that 1 in 4 Americans participates in no leisure-time physical activity.ⁱ

It is troublesome that in today's world, even with a heightened recognition of the health benefits of engaging in physical activity, expansion of the parks, recreation, sports and fitness industry and many efforts to encourage individuals to adopt a healthy lifestyle, the majority of Americans (particularly youth, low-income families, minority citizens, and females) still do not achieve recommended physical activity levels.ⁱ

Proximity of Facilities

It has been demonstrated that parks, recreation, fitness and sport facilities within close proximity to one's home often mean that citizens engage in more physical activity.ⁱⁱ

- The closer the facility/program, the more likely it is that a resident will make use of it. Studies demonstrated that there were differences even between distances as small as one mile and one half mile with those in close walking distance.ⁱⁱⁱ
- The socioeconomic status (SES) of neighborhoods often dictates what physical activity resources are available and how accessible they are to the residents. Individuals from lower SES neighborhoods may have limited ability to control their physical activity in the face of inaccessible environments.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Great Outdoors & Physical Activity

Outdoor recreation and access to nature play a vital role in the physical, psychological, spiritual well-being, health, and development of people of all ages.^{iv} Open space and outdoor recreation areas provide places for people to play and exercise-activity such as this contributes to public health and also can help reduce health care costs.^v

- America's lands and waters offer a multitude of outdoor recreation activities that enhance health and wellness^v however many of these do not have easy access to majority of cities and large urban areas.
- Urban parks and community green spaces are essential for providing places for people to recreate outdoors^v
- In addition to federally owned and operated lands, state, county, and municipal entities manage thousands of parks, natural areas, and historic sites^v that can provide countless opportunities for physical activity.

Linking Sports with Community Physical Activity

There are a wide variety of professional, amateur (AAU, Olympics) and college athletic and sports facilities throughout the country that are utilized by athletes training at an elite level. These same facilities could be used to enhance physical activity opportunities in communities without subtracting from their primary uses.

- This would increase the number of available facilities in a dense area with little room for new building.
- Allows for shared resources in a world where duplication is becoming increasingly costly and wasteful.
- Best Practice Example: Malvern College in the UK opened a new multi-million pound state of the art sports complex in 2010. Agreements have been signed for facility use by a local athletic club as well as one with the local community for general use by residents.

Policy Changes to Increase Physical Activity-A National Physical Activity Plan

The United States first National Physical Activity Plan (Plan) was launched in 2010 with a vision: One day, all Americans will be physically active and they will live, work, and play in environments that facilitate regular physical activity.^{vi} The Plan, a public-private sector effort, consists of a set of policies, programs, and initiatives directed to increasing physical activity in all segments of the American population. The Plan provides a roadmap to get America moving. It addresses the behavioral, policy, educational, medical and physical infrastructure issues that affect how and why so many Americans are not moving. It unites professionals across sectors – in recreation, sports, fitness, medicine and public health, transportation and urban planning, business and education – in a massive effort to collaborate and solve the problem. Countless numbers of organizations are working together to change our communities in ways that will enable every American to be sufficiently physically active.

Immediate Priorities for the Parks, Recreation Fitness and Sports Sector

- **Increase funding and resources for high need areas in parks, recreation, fitness, and sports.**
 - Health, education, recreation and land use federal agencies will promote joint use agreements as a best practice to improve community physical activity and recreation. Increase the number of local joint use agreements by a 10 percent (or more) by 2015.
 - Provide model policies for use by recreation agencies, public schools, and youth serving organizations in 2011.
 - Host a Joint Use National Summit in 2012
- **Coordinate advocacy to integrate physical activity opportunities into open spaces and outdoor recreation areas. Maintain and enhance environmental functions and values.**
 - Catalogue state strategies that promote outdoor physical activity by April 2011
 - Introduce federal legislation in the Senate to integrate physical activity opportunities in open spaces and outdoor recreation in 2011.
 - Enlist five states to develop 2011 strategies to implement the federal legislation to integrate physical activity opportunities in open spaces and outdoor recreation.
- **Use existing professional, amateur (AAU, Olympics) and college (NCAA) athletics and sports infrastructures to enhance physical activity opportunities in communities.**
 - Targeted professional, amateur and collegiate organizations will develop new and utilize existing programs to enhance physical activity opportunities in communities by late 2015.

- Develop an inventory of existing physical activity programs offered by professional, amateur and collegiate organizations in 2011.
- Increase physical activity programs for use by communities by 10 percent by late 2011.

The National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity (NCPA) is the leading force in the country promoting physical activity and fitness initiatives. NCPA is a diverse blend of associations, health organizations, and private corporations, advocating for initiatives and policies that encourage Americans of all ages to become more physically active. NCPA is providing the leadership for implementation of the National Physical Activity Plan. For more information on the Plan, please visit www.physicalactivityplan.org

ⁱMowen, A. J., & Baker, B. L. (2009). Park, recreation, fitness and sport sector recommendations for a more physically active America: A white paper for the United States National Physical Activity Plan. *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*, 6/(Suppl. 2), S236-S244.

ⁱⁱGodbey, Geoffrey C., Mowen, Andrew. (2010). *The Benefits of Physical Activity: The Scientific Evidence*. Ashburn, Virginia: National Recreation and Parks Association.

ⁱⁱⁱMowen, A., and Confer, J. (2003). The relationship between perceptions, distance, and socio-demographic characteristics upon public use of an urban park "in-fill." *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 23(3), 58-74.

^{iv}White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity Report to the President, United States Government, 2011

^vAmerica's Great Outdoors: A Promise to Future Generations Report, United States Government, February 2011

^{vi}U.S. National Physical Activity Plan (2010). National Physical Activity Plan. Retrieved January 5, 2011, from <http://physicalactivityplan.org/theplan.php>

For More Information Contact:

Sheila Franklin
The National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity
1100 H Street, NW • Suite 510
Washington DC • 20005
202.454.7521
www.ncppa.org • sfranklin@ncppa.org

