



FACTS

Physical Activity Promotion in Public Health

Overview

The costs attributable to insufficient physical activity by a majority of Americans are astounding. In 2006, direct U.S. medical costs due to lack of physical activity were estimated to be greater than \$188 billion per year.ⁱ Experts widely agree that one of the 3 most important factors that influence health are is physical activity.ⁱⁱ Physical inactivity contributes to a broad spectrum of health problems—from joint and muscular to cardio, diabetes, osteoporosis, etc. —when combined with the resulting economic costs (medical, lost productivity, etc.) it is clear why it is critical that Americans increase their daily physical activity. The Physical Activity Collaborative, made up of several national public health groups, calls it “one of the nation’s most critical public health challenges and one of the nation’s greatest opportunities to improve health across the entire population.”ⁱ

Public health agencies and organizations, both government and non-government, complement the health care delivery system and community sectors to monitor, protect, and promote prevention and the public’s health. Physical inactivity is a health issue that crosses many sectors and in order to affect change it is imperative for public health entities to partner with community organizations, including schools, businesses, planning agencies, healthcare organizations, and recreation and park agencies. These types of partnerships will better enable communities to plan, promote, and coordinate efforts to increase physical activity and to insure that strategies to reduce health disparities in physical activity are included.ⁱⁱⁱ

Making the Case

The facts and figures demonstrating the need to decrease sedentary behavior and increase physical activity in this country are astounding. It is important to understand some of the facts and figures in order to chart the course for moving forward and reversing the startling numbers.

- Despite substantial health benefits from moderate amounts of physical activity, more than half of American adults do not engage in enough physical

activity to receive health benefits. Indeed, about 25% of adults are not physically active at all in their leisure time.ⁱ

- In 2005, nearly two-thirds of 9th and 12th grade students were not meeting the recommended levels of physical activity. Daily participation in high school physical education classes dropped from 42% in 1991 to 33% in 2005.ⁱ
- Although the National Physical Activity Guidelines state the call for youth to get 60 minutes of physical activity (moderate and vigorous) per day there is no federal law requires physical education to be provided to students in American schools.^{iv}
- Heart disease is the leading cause of death among men and women in the United States. Physically inactive people are twice as likely to develop coronary heart disease as regularly active people.^v
- An investment of \$10 per person per year in proven community-based programs to increase physical activity, improve nutrition, and prevent tobacco use could save the country more than \$16 billion annually within five years. This is a return of \$5.60 for every \$1ⁱⁱ
- A 1999 study found that women who either walked briskly for 1.5 hours per week or swam laps for 45 minutes per week reduced their risk of a non-fatal heart attack or death due to coronary disease by about 90 percent.^{vi}

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.^{vii} 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 educational, behavioral, policy, medical and physical infrastructure issues that affect how and why so many Americans are not moving. It unites professionals across sectors – in public health, education, recreation, sports, fitness, transportation and urban planning, medicine, and business – 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 Public Health Sector

- **Develop and maintain an ethnically and culturally diverse public health workforce of both genders with competence and expertise in physical activity and health.**
 - Increase diversity among the Physical Activity in Public Health Specialists certified professionals, as well as increase the number of certified professionals who are trained to work with diverse populations from 100 to 400 by September, 2015.
 - Engage national member organizations in recruitment efforts to educate academic institutions about the value of increasing the number of diverse professionals who are certified Physical Activity in Public Health Specialists.
 - Identify and share national, state and local informational resources about the positive outcomes in physical activity for the community at large, (including ethnically and culturally diverse communities), brought about as a result of increasing the number of diverse Physical Activity in Public Health Specialists certified professionals.
 - Encourage professional societies in public health to adopt and disseminate core competencies for public health practitioners in physical activity and update the core competencies on a regular basis.
- **Disseminate tools and resources to promote physical activity, including resources that address the burden of disease due to inactivity, the implementation of evidence based interventions, and funding opportunities for physical activity initiatives.**
 - Increase the number of submissions of state and territory tools and resources as well as increase the number of individuals who have are aware and have access to them.
 - Dedicate efforts to increase the implementation of positive behavioral interventions and subsequent changes in physical activity by September, 2015.
 - Actively work for adoption of physical activity regulations in childcare settings by a minimum of six states by September, 2015.
 - Actively disseminate information of the 2011 release of early childhood physical activity standards through presentations at state, regional and national conferences as well as using web based technology such as a webinar.

- **Educate policy makers to invest in monitoring and evaluation of physical activity behaviors and policy and environmental indicators.**
 - Develop new interventions and surveillance methods that will lead to the expansion of policies and environmental determinants of physical activity in communities.
 - Create a strong evaluation system that measures the effectiveness of public health approaches aimed at promoting active lifestyles.
 - Educate policymakers and other stakeholders about the importance of investing in monitoring and evaluation with a focus on long-term cost-savings.

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, visit <http://www.physicalactivityplan.org>

ⁱ The Physical Activity Collaborative, The Critical Need for Public Health Leadership and Capacity to Improve Health through Physical Activity: Recommendations from the Physical Activity Collaborative

ⁱⁱ Levi J, Segal LM, Juliano C. *Prevention for a Healthier America: Investments in Disease Prevention Yield Significant Savings, Stronger Communities*. Washington, DC: Trust for America's Health, 2008.

ⁱⁱⁱ Heath, GWH, The Role of the Public Health Sector in Promoting Physical Activity: National, State, and Local Applications, *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*, 2009, 6(Suppl 2), S159–S167.

^{iv} National Association for Sport and Physical Education & American Heart Association. (2010). 2010 Shape of the nation report: Status of physical education in the USA. Reston, VA: National Association for Sport and Physical Education.

^v Published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (www.fitness.gov)

^{vi} J.E. Manson, F.B. Hu, J.W. Rich-Edwards, G.A. Colditz, M.J. Stampfer, W.C. Willett, F.E. Speizer and C.H. Hennekens, "A prospective study of walking as compared with vigorous exercise in the prevention of coronary heart disease in women," *New England Journal of Medicine* 341, no. 9 (1999): 650-658. (Cited in F as in Fat, 2007)

^{vii} U.S. National Physical Activity Plan (2010). National Physical Activity Plan. Retrieved January 5, 2011, from

<http://physicalactivityplan.org/theplan.php>

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