

State Policies for Shaping Healthy, Active Communities: A Michigan Case Study

Executive Summary

People who are regularly active enjoy a number of health benefits, including reduced risks of obesity and overweight, heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and some cancers. However, less than 48 percent of the U.S. adult population meets recommendations for moderate physical activity. Poor diet and inactivity are second only to tobacco as the leading cause of death in the United States.

Decisions about whether or not to be physically active depend in part on personal choices, but the built environment also influences opportunities for activity. Research has found that the amount of time individuals spend walking, bicycling, and otherwise engaged in routine physical activity is influenced by the distance between homes, work, and retail, as well as by the safety and appeal of the walking environment.

Some states have adopted “active community policies”—that is, development, land use, and transportation policies that help ensure the built environment supports physical activity. Policies that lead to increases in activity can help states control their health care costs related to employees’ health care consumption, absenteeism, and the number of claims filed for Medicaid assistance.

This *Issue Brief* presents **Michigan** as a case study to illustrate the types of policies that states are implementing to help people become more physically active. Michigan’s active community policies include the following:

- ***Development strategies***, such as comprehensive planning policies that facilitate the construction of walking infrastructure and support development around mass transit hubs.
- ***Revitalization strategies*** that invest in pedestrian-focused older neighborhoods and transit-rich urban cores. Brownfields and historic preservation programs, for instance, allow for development and revitalization within existing communities.
- ***Transportation policies*** that make it safer and more desirable for people to walk or bicycle. For example, context sensitive design policies ensure that new or expanded transportation projects consider residents’ aesthetic, historic, multimodal, and environmental preferences.
- ***Open space preservation policies***, such as those that create green infrastructure for trails, parks, and other recreational opportunities.

An important complement to Michigan’s active community policies are its health education and promotion programs. Active community policies help create the places to be physically active, and health policies help motivate state residents to be active.

Introduction

Poor diet and physical inactivity are second only to tobacco as the leading cause of death in the United States.¹ However, less than 48 percent of the U.S. adult population meets recommendations for daily, moderate physical activity.² Personal choice ultimately determines whether or not a person is active, but the environment in which one lives, works, and plays is an important factor in that choice.

The characteristics of active communities—communities that support regular, daily physical activity—include grid-like, walkable streets; places for recreation; and neighborhoods with a mix of homes, businesses, and civic buildings in walking distance of one another (i.e., mixed-used development). Several states have adopted development, land use, and transportation policies that help to create active communities. This *Issue Brief* discusses Michigan's active community policies to illustrate the types of strategies states are employing.

Like most other states, Michigan is confronting high levels of obesity and inactivity among its residents:

- Sixty-two percent of adults in the state are considered either overweight or obese.
- Fifty-three percent of adults in the state report participating in physical activity less than the recommended 30 minutes per day.
- Twenty-four percent participate in no leisure time physical activity at all.³

States are focusing more and more on active communities because these policies have the potential to help address such increasing health concerns while also providing a number of economic and social benefits to states and their residents. First, increased physical activity can improve health by reducing risks of obesity and overweight, heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and some cancers; contributing to healthy bones, muscles, and joints; reducing depression and anxiety; and improving balance to aid in preventing falls.⁴

Second, the health benefits realized by increased physical activity also help states address growing health care costs. In real dollars, the direct medical costs due to physical inactivity in the United States were \$29 billion in 1987; by 2000, direct medical costs due to

What is a Walkable Community?

There are various ways to define a "walkable community." Each state and community should consider a definition that is appropriate for its context.

The Campaign to Make America Walkable has developed the following characteristics as a general description of what you might expect to find in a walkable community.

- People of all ages and abilities have easy access to their community "on foot"—an automobile is not needed for every trip.
- People walk more and the community and neighborhoods are safer, healthier, and friendlier places.
- Parents feel comfortable about their children being outside in their neighborhoods; they don't worry about the threat of motor vehicles.
- Children spend more time outside with other children and are more active, physically fit, and healthy.
- Streets and highways are designed or reconstructed to provide safe and comfortable facilities for pedestrians and are safe and easy to cross for people of all ages and abilities.
- Pedestrians are given priority in neighborhood, work, school, and shopping areas. Motor vehicle speeds are reduced (and, in some places, motor vehicles have been eliminated entirely) to ensure compatibility with pedestrian traffic.
- Motor vehicle operating speeds are carefully controlled to ensure compatibility with adjacent land uses and the routine presence of pedestrians.
- Drivers of motor vehicles operate them in a prudent, responsible fashion, knowing that they will be held strictly accountable for any threat, injury, or death caused by their lack of due care or violation of the vehicle code.
- The air and water quality are good.

Source: Campaign to Make America Walkable, *Creating Walkable Communities: A Guide for Local Governments*, December 1998. Available at: <http://www.bikewalk.org>.

physical inactivity had reached nearly \$76.6 billion.⁵ Michigan has been experiencing double-digit annual increases in health insurance premiums, and more than 70 percent of the costs are directly attributable to chronic disease, much of which could be prevented through lifestyle changes.⁶

Third, active community policies can help states reduce their infrastructure costs, because active communities tend to be more compact than most sprawl communities and require less infrastructure per person. Research suggests that **New Jersey** communities, for example, could save \$1.3 billion in infrastructure costs over 20 years by avoiding unplanned sprawl development. Even a modest implementation of higher-density development would save the state of **South Carolina** \$2.7 billion in infrastructure costs over 20 years.⁷ Moreover, the development of walkable, compact communities can help foster a high quality of life, thus attracting businesses and new residents to the area and contributing to a strong economy.

Michigan's Policies for Shaping Healthy, Active Communities: An Overview

Every state can adopt a number of strategies to modify the built environment in ways that make it easier for residents to be physically active. Many state policies that are traditionally seen as economic development or land use strategies already affect whether or not the built environment supports physical activity.

Michigan's active community policies, discussed more fully in the subsequent sections of this *Issue Brief*, fall into four general categories:

- **Development policies.** State growth and development policies can create active communities by encouraging development that is mindful of pedestrian and bicyclists' needs. Michigan's development policies provide financial and technical resources to build urban shopping districts, greenways, pedestrian malls, and other walkable and bikeable areas.
- **Revitalization policies.** Michigan has enacted policies to return idle properties to productive use, combat blight, and preserve historic places, all of which help to conserve walkable places that were designed before most residents had an automobile.
- **Transportation policies.** Michigan's transportation strategies support the construction and maintenance of walking and bicycling infrastructure. They also address pedestrian and cyclist safety. The policies discussed in this *Brief* include a new context-sensitive design directive, an active-communities assessment and award, and a "safe routes to school" program.
- **Open space conservation policies.** State open space conservation policies can help create active communities by protecting and enhancing recreational spaces and walking/bicycling routes, as well as by controlling sprawl. Michigan's policies include the conservation of green spaces for recreation and "active transportation" such as walking or bicycling to work, as well as the conservation of farmland.

An important complement to Michigan's active community policies are its health education and promotion programs. Active community policies help create the places to be physically active, and health policies help motivate state residents to be active.

Many of Michigan's active community policies were developed with something other than increasing physical activity as their primary goal. For example, Michigan's Land Bank Fast Track laws (described in detail in the "State Revitalization Strategies" section below) were put in place to facilitate the redevelopment of tax-reverted properties and revitalize neighborhoods; however, these laws also promote physical activity by increasing neighborhood safety and providing destinations to which people will want to walk.^{8,9}

For ease of discussion, this *Issue Brief* divides Michigan's policies and programs into the four categories outlined in the list above: development, revitalization, transportation, and open space conservation. Some of Michigan's strategies are relatively inexpensive, simple programs while others are comprehensive frameworks for invigorating communities. The range of strategies described offers leaders in other states a variety of policy options.

Development Strategies

Many of the strategies states employ to promote real estate and economic development also help to create active communities. For instance, policies that encourage a commingling of shops, homes, and community resources help to create social gathering places and vibrant commercial districts that attract employees and businesses to the community. These same places encourage greater physical activity because they are inviting to pedestrians and compact enough to reach destinations by foot. Research has found that the amount of time individuals spend walking, bicycling, and otherwise engaging in routine physical activity is often influenced by the distance between residences, work, and retail, as well as the appeal of the walking environment.^{10,11}

Michigan's approach to development is twofold:

- create a plan to direct future growth and reduce sprawl's negative impacts, and
- help make Michigan's cities attractive to knowledge workers and the businesses who need them.

Creating a Plan for the State's Growth and Development

As a first step in creating a plan for growth and development, Michigan Governor Jennifer M. Granholm has worked with other state leaders to identify growth priorities and address the negative effects of sprawl. [Executive Order 2003-4](#) created the bipartisan [Michigan Land Use Leadership Council](#) (MLULC) to outline principles to guide future state, regional, and local land use policies. Several of the principles in the MLULC's final report directly support active communities by calling on the state and local governments to take steps to:

- create walkable and bikeable, compact, mixed-use, mixed-income urban cores and neighborhoods;
- allow local governments to support these characteristics;
- consider public health, safety, and environmental quality in infrastructure-related decision-making; and
- create green infrastructure (such as parks, trails, nature preserves, watersheds, and open space) that contributes to the sustainability of every community.¹²

Another executive order issued by Governor Granholm, [Executive Order 2003-18](#), created the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth (DLEG) to harmonize the state's economic expansion and redevelopment efforts by centralizing them in one department. Since DLEG oversees both urban revitalization and economic development programs, it is capable of directing business growth and expansion to targeted urban cores whenever possible.

The order is one step Michigan has taken to provide a single point of contact for businesses wishing to locate or expand in the state. Another is the [Michigan Timely Application and Permit Service](#) (MiTAPS). Created in 2004, MiTAPS provides a one-stop shop where businesses can determine every permit they must file to do business in Michigan. Also in 2004, four bills were enacted (HB [4284](#), [4666](#), [4667](#), and [4668](#)) that make it easier for local governments to collaborate when planning

for future growth. The laws make it possible for two or more municipalities to work together by establishing joint planning commissions. Such commissions are important because they coordinate infrastructure investments and programs to direct growth to preferred areas.

Attracting Knowledge Workers to Michigan Cities

In September 2003, the state began a new, comprehensive economic development initiative called [Cool Cities](#). The goal of the initiative is to ensure that Michigan's cities are vibrant, diverse cultural centers with a multitude of employment options, thus attracting new workers and the businesses that need them. In other words, the primary goal of Cool Cities is economic development, but the initiative has also emerged as a tool to create healthy, active communities. In the Cool Cities [online survey](#), the three top-ranked attributes for downtown areas among Michigan residents were: 1) walkable streets, 2) gathering places, and 3) many jobs.¹³ Residents identified walkability—a primary characteristic of an active community—as the number one attribute for urban centers, demonstrating the connection between economic development and healthy, active places.

The initiative revolves around a pilot program that currently involves [20 Cool City communities](#). The pilot program combines more than 100 community improvement grants, tax credits, loans, and assistance programs from 14 different state agencies into a single [Resource Toolbox](#). Each of the chosen “cool cities” receives assistance in accessing millions of dollars from the Toolbox, as well as a \$100,000 Catalyst Grant to help begin the planning process. Plus, the cities receive priority access to these state resources and expedited processing of their planning and development requests.

Examples of the pilot projects in three cities demonstrate the Cool Cities initiative's emphasis on shaping healthy, active communities:

- In the City of Alpena, the Catalyst Grant will be used to develop a [pedestrian-oriented heritage walkway](#) on both sides of the Thunder Bay River, providing links between the downtown, public and private development projects, and an existing 13.5-mile bicycle path.¹⁴
- In Detroit, investment in recreating the historic [Eastern Market](#) is expected to produce a vibrant, walkable, mixed-use neighborhood. The project will establish an education center to increase the understanding of how an individual can improve personal health with nutritious foods. It will also construct a greenway to create a link to the waterfront. The project is expected to bolster the Eastern Market's economic viability by incubating small businesses and creating spinoff investment in restaurant, residential, and market-related businesses adjacent to the city-owned sheds.¹⁵
- In Grand Rapids, the [Uptown Revitalization Project](#) will focus on three interrelated components. First, the project will create distinct, attractive, and user-friendly signage to ensure a pedestrian-friendly neighborhood with a sense of place. Second, it will improve the facades of historic commercial buildings to ensure an attractive walking and shopping environment. Finally, the project will include new state-of-the-art retail development that is compatible with historic district standards and uses green technology. The green building is sited on a former brownfield and includes zero storm water discharge technology, a vegetative roof garden, an environmental energy demonstration center, and passive solar design strategies.¹⁶ Environmentally friendly reuse of the property will help to ensure clean air and water, as well as a place to be active.

Revitalization Strategies

State strategies to revitalize distressed communities are primarily intended to combat economic problems. Areas in which there are abandoned, unproductive properties often suffer from urban decay because these properties attract crime, vermin, and dumping; create safety and fire hazards; depress

property values; and degrade quality of life.¹⁷ A 2001 study of Philadelphia, for example, found that houses near a neglected, vacant property experienced a net loss in value of up to \$7,627.¹⁸ In addition to addressing economic problems, state revitalization strategies have the potential to protect and improve public health. Individuals who perceive their neighborhoods as unsafe are less likely to be physically active,¹⁹ and community revitalization programs remove real and perceived threats to safety.

Michigan's revitalization strategies aid distressed communities by expediting the conversion of idle properties and blighted areas to productive, attractive places and by promoting historic preservation in order to maintain older communities.

Expediting the Conversion of Idle Properties and Blighted Areas to Productive Use

Michigan policies are encouraging the redevelopment of idle properties and blighted areas in three ways. First, they are accelerating the process of selling properties held by the state. Second, Michigan policies are expediting the removal of blight violations. Third, the state is helping to redevelop brownfields that are contaminated or potentially contaminated with hazardous substances.

In 2004, Michigan enacted the "land bank fast track authority" with the aim of more quickly redeveloping properties that, owing to tax problems, have reverted to the state or have been turned over to a local government. The land bank laws created a state-level land bank, supported by a newly established fund, and allow municipalities to create local land bank authorities. The land banks allow residents and businesses to buy idle properties more quickly and thereby revitalize long-vacant buildings. As a result, neighborhoods feel, and often are, safer and more supportive of walking, bicycling, and playing outside. The land banks can clear titles, acquire and assemble property for sale or lease, and preserve the value of the property by demolition, management, repair, or other actions—plus, they may do so without approval from the local jurisdiction in which the property is located.²⁰

Michigan has also put in place new laws to expedite the removal of blight violations ([Public Act No. 319](#)). District courts have limited resources to process their large volume of blight-related cases. The new laws permit local governments to establish local administrative hearings bureaus to expedite cases involving blight and remove them from the district court docket, allowing for quicker community revitalization.²¹ The new laws are based on an innovative system developed by the city of Chicago. Like the land banks, administrative hearings bureaus support the creation and maintenance of clean, vibrant communities that invite people to be active.

Finally, Michigan offers an extensive set of incentives and resources to support brownfields redevelopment. Brownfields are properties where expansion, redevelopment, or reuse may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance.²² While lying idle, brownfields provide little or no tax revenues for cities, counties, or states and depress surrounding property values. Brownfields effectively leave a void within a community that often discourages walking, bicycling, and other physical activity.

Michigan has been a leader in making brownfield redevelopment more attractive to developers. In 1995, Michigan law was amended to impose cleanup liability only upon those causing the contamination, departing from federal law that at the time imposed liability upon any property owner regardless of whether or not the owner's actions caused the contamination. (Federal liability has since been amended under the [Small Business Liability Relief and Brownfields Revitalization Act](#), Public Law 107-118, enacted in January 2002.) Michigan's legal reforms related to brownfields have resulted in substantial economic benefits. Surveys have found that private investment as a result of the 1995 amendments totaled over \$4 billion from 1996 to 2002, and almost 12,000 new jobs have

been reported.²³ In 1996, state officials also signed into law new financial incentives to encourage redevelopment.

Michigan's hallmark brownfields fund is the [Clean Michigan Initiative \(CMI\)](#), a \$675-million general obligation bond approved in November 1998. CMI targets \$335 million specifically for brownfield assessment and cleanup that also promotes redevelopment. Recently, for instance, CMI contributed to a revival of downtown Jackson, Michigan. Consumers Energy is a private-sector utility that has been headquartered in Jackson since 1886 and is one of the city's largest employers. Through the cooperation of Consumers Energy, the city, county, state, and several federal agencies, a blighted downtown block that was once six former brownfields has been transformed into a \$113-million urban campus. The redevelopment consists of Consumers Energy's new headquarters, a new public amphitheater, a sculpture garden, river promenade, two parking decks, and green space. It has generated more than 700 new high-wage jobs and spurred the establishment of new restaurants and businesses.²⁴

Supporting Historic Preservation to Preserve the State's Active Communities

By supporting historic preservation, Michigan creates attractive places to live, work, and visit that contribute to the strength of the state economy. It is estimated that historic preservation has added a total of \$1.7 billion to Michigan's economy and has returned almost \$32 million to local property tax rolls since 1971.²⁵ At the same time, historic preservation helps to preserve active communities by maintaining the older, compact neighborhoods that predate the multi-car household. One study found that residents who live in homes built before 1974 tend to walk more than residents in newer homes. The study used home age as a proxy for neighborhood elements that are known to influence transportation choices, such as density, building design, and street patterns.²⁶

To honor and encourage historic preservation efforts in Michigan, Governor Granholm created the annual Governor's Award for Historic Preservation and presented the first awards in May 2003. In addition, Michigan's historic tax credit—a nonrefundable credit equal to 25 percent of the qualified expenditures used for rehabilitating a historic resource—helps make restoration possible by reducing individual-income or single-business tax liability.

Transportation Strategies

People who live in neighborhoods with grid-pattern streets, sidewalks, and easy street crossings often make more walking and transit trips than people who live in communities that lack these characteristics (e.g., communities with unclear crosswalks, multiple cul-de-sacs, etc.).²⁷ In fact, neighborhoods with small blocks and extensive sidewalk systems have on average three times the pedestrian volume that neighborhoods characterized by large blocks and incomplete sidewalks have.²⁸

Michigan has developed policies and programs to help ensure that communities' transportation networks allow for safe and appealing physical activity. These strategies include:

- incorporating “context-sensitive design” into transportation projects,
- helping communities identify, improve, and expand infrastructure that is supportive of walking and bicycling, and
- evaluating safe routes to school and other daily destinations.

Using a Context-Sensitive Design Process for the State's Transportation Projects

In December 2003, Governor Granholm issued [Executive Directive 2003-25](#), instructing the [Michigan Department of Transportation](#) (MDOT) to use a “[context-sensitive design](#)” process when

executing a transportation project to the extent possible. Governor Granholm’s directive also calls upon MDOT to encourage local transportation agencies to utilize CSD.²⁹

[Context sensitive design](#) (CSD) is a process by which transportation planners engage community leaders and stakeholders early in the project planning process. The goal is to develop a transportation system that fits its physical setting and addresses resident needs like walkability, historic character, neighborhood cohesiveness, and other active community features. As a first step in developing a new CSD process, MDOT has held numerous workshops designed to broaden state and community leaders’ understanding of context-sensitive design. Follow-up focus groups are currently developing specific recommendations for the department.

Helping Communities Identify, Improve, and Expand Their Walking and Bicycling Infrastructure

To aid communities in improving and expanding their walking and bicycling infrastructure, Michigan has established the [Promoting Active Communities](#) program. This program includes 1) a community self-assessment tool, 2) a [resource guide](#), and 3) an award program that recognizes communities that have made their built environment more conducive to physical activity.

Community leaders use the self-assessment to evaluate their infrastructure and design. Produced by the Michigan Department of Community Health and the Michigan Governor’s Council on Physical Fitness, Health, and Sports (Governor’s Council), it assesses the following elements of an active community:

- non-motorized transportation infrastructure,
- mixed-use,
- cluster zoning (designing higher density developments in one area of the community while preserving open space nearby),
- bike lanes,
- sidewalks,
- bicycle and pedestrian safety education programs,
- physical activity promotion programs,
- healthy worksites, and
- healthy schools/school routes.³⁰

The resource guide points to sources of practical information that communities can use to develop policies and plans to encourage healthy physical activity. It includes potential funding sources for projects, materials on creating pedestrian and bicycle facilities, information about successful walking programs, etc.

The recognition program honors communities that have improved the built environment in ways to make it more conducive to physical activity. Each community receives an award at an annual [Designing Healthy Livable Communities conference](#). One such honoree is the city of Port Huron. Since 2003, city officials have taken steps to improve bicycle and walking paths by making them more user-friendly. The city has built rest areas, removed barriers to entering the paths, constructed bike racks, and performs regular maintenance. City leaders have also focused on keeping their residents safe by clearing sidewalks, improving crosswalks, and promoting safety helmet use.

Evaluating Safe Routes for Walking or Bicycling

Three state agencies in Michigan—the departments of community health, education, and transportation—and the Michigan Governor’s Council on Physical Fitness, Health, and Sports have developed a pilot “safe routes to school” program that is currently sponsoring one school in each of

11 communities. This program encourages children to be more physically active by eliminating the barriers that make walking or bicycling to school unsafe or appear to be unsafe. Interdisciplinary teams are analyzing the built environment around these schools and educating community members about safe routes for walking and bicycling. The 11 schools are representative of urban, rural, and suburban communities, and the state is using the information from these pilots to produce a uniform toolkit for schools across the state.

One of the schools in Michigan's pilot program is in the city of Jackson. Jackson's [Project U-Turn](#) evaluates not just routes to school but also safe routes to work. (In addition to receiving state funding, Jackson has been awarded a grant by the national [Active Living by Design](#) program for this work.) Starting in summer 2005, the city's analysis tool will be rolled out to multiple schools, and adults will evaluate safe routes to specific work destinations. Then, residents will recommend to city leaders safety improvements for the walking and bicycling environment.

Project U-Turn will also develop "active commute" maps. The personalized maps will highlight safe routes between residents' homes and places they frequent. One other unique component of the project is the development of "[cool buses.](#)" Project U-Turn is surveying Jackson youth to find out how to make public buses more appealing to teens. The project will gauge interest in offering buses with specific routes to teen destinations (i.e., mall or movie theater), couches instead of seats, movies during the ride, etc. Armed with this information, the city will develop two "cool buses" aimed at attracting youth to public transportation.

Open Space Conservation Strategies

States' open space conservation policies can help create active communities by controlling sprawl and protecting places for recreation and "active transportation" such as walking or bicycling to work. As discussed below, Michigan's policies include 1) supporting the conservation of green spaces for recreation and "active transportation," like walking or bicycling to work; and 2) conserving farmland by purchasing the rights to develop the land.

Conserving Green Spaces

Green space conservation programs protect places to recreate and greenways where people can be active while traveling to work or school each day. Facilities that provide a safe place to be outside are central to encouraging physical activity. Studies have shown that the amount of time children spend outside is a major predictor of their physical activity levels.³¹

State leaders in Michigan are encouraging local governments to create plans that utilize green space as a tool for improving residents' daily quality of life. A local unit of government—such as a city council, recreational authority's board of directors, or a school board—must create and maintain an approved, five-year recreation plan to be eligible for recreation grants from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Local units of government use DNR's [Guidelines for the Development of Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plans](#) to develop their recreation plans. In 2004, this document was substantially revised to reflect state leaders' desire to foster a new perspective that envisions green space as a tool to promote physical activity, social interaction, and more. The new DNR guidelines assist communities in creating recreation plans that consider the potential for every element of the built environment to encourage physical activity.

First, the DNR guidelines encourage communities to think of parks as more than just the areas formally designated as parkland. People do not congregate, recreate, or otherwise enjoy the outdoors only in these areas. They use streets, town squares, plazas, marketplaces, conservation lands, and numerous other areas, both publicly and privately owned. Numerous indoor facilities also serve the public's recreation needs. Taking this perspective requires thinking and planning beyond the borders of traditional parks and designing a system of trails, greenways, and other publicly-used spaces.

Second, because recreational facilities such as trails and sidewalks often cross multiple local jurisdictions, the DNR guidance outlines how communities can engage in coordinated recreational planning, as well as integrate recreation plans with their community-wide comprehensive plans. In short, Michigan's DNR provides local governments with tools to better anticipate and direct future growth patterns, illustrating how state and local land use efforts can complement one another and help create active communities.

Beyond the planning assistance DNR offers to local communities, Michigan offers numerous grant programs to support the creation and maintenance of green spaces and recreational facilities. Some of these programs are described in the text box on this page. Combined with DNR's parks and green space

guidance, these grants provide a suite of tools for creating active Michigan communities. For example, the Recreational Improvement Fund has paid for improvements to a bridge that crosses the Muskegon River along the White Pine Trail, a 92-mile, five-county rail-to-trail corridor that runs from just outside Grand Rapids to Cadillac, Michigan. The trail provides access to shopping, museums, a zoo, botanical gardens, and historic sites in several communities.

Conserving Farmland

Farmland conservation programs indirectly assist in shaping healthy, active communities by providing support to farms that are struggling as development encroaches on them. They direct new development to established communities by limiting the amount of relatively inexpensive land that can be bought up on the metropolitan fringe.

The [Michigan Agricultural Preservation Fund Board](#) is currently creating a grant program to support local-level purchase of development rights (PDR) programs to aid in farmland conservation. PDR programs buy the rights to development from farmers while allowing the landowners to retain the

Michigan's Green Space Conservation Grant Programs

- [Land and Water Conservation Fund \(LWCF\)](#) — Michigan, like other states, works with the federal government to provide grants to local units of government and state agencies to acquire and develop land for outdoor recreation. Michigan's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) makes recommendations to the National Park Service, which grants final approval.
- [Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund \(MNRTF\)](#) — Since 1976, the MNRTF has provided financial assistance to local governments and Michigan's DNR to purchase lands for outdoor recreation and/or the protection of natural resources. Twenty-five percent of annual funds may be used to develop recreational facilities. The MNRTF is supported by annual revenues from the development of state-owned mineral resources, largely oil and gas.
- [Recreation Improvement Fund Grants](#)—Grants funded by Michigan's Recreation Improvement Fund are available for the operation, maintenance and development of recreation trails; restoration of lands damaged by off-road vehicles; and inland lake cleanup. Local units of government may apply for grants but must partner with a division of Michigan's DNR.
- [Recreational Trails Program Grants](#)—Using federal gas tax funds, Michigan's DNR funds the maintenance and development of state and state/local recreational trails and related facilities. Local units of government may receive grant funding as long as they partner with a division of Michigan's DNR and their portion of a project links to facilities on DNR land.

rights to farm the property. The funds help to offset the rising property taxes associated with farmland pressured by sprawl.

The Michigan Agricultural Preservation Fund Board has thus far established the process for selecting grant applications for the local-level program. The next step will be to determine whether sufficient funds are available for an application cycle to occur in 2005. In addition, since 1994, Michigan has administered its own [PDR program](#) that permanently restricts any nonagricultural use on participating farms. To date, the state-level program has protected over 15,300 acres at an investment of more than \$27 million.

Health Education and Promotion Programs

It is important to recognize that a main determinant in whether or not people are active is their own personal choice. For that reason, state-level health education and promotion programs are a vital complement to active community policies. While active community policies create the places to be physically active, education and promotion programs provide the motivation for residents to engage in physical activity.

To complement its active community policies, Michigan has created several programs that encourage and provide tools for physical activity throughout a person's life. Governor Granholm's office, the Michigan Department of Community Health (DCH), and the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness, Health, and Sports have developed initiatives to:

- promote healthy lifestyles,
- evaluate the status of and improve residents' health, and
- develop basic physical activity skills early in life to prepare for a lifetime of activity.

Promoting Healthy Lifestyles Among State Residents

Governor Granholm has used her bully pulpit to encourage Michigan residents to be active. In summer 2004 and 2005, she called on residents to participate in the [Active Michigan Summer](#) challenge by walking, running, or bicycling in a local race. Governor Granholm also created and participated in the [First Annual Governor's Labor Day Bridge Run](#), where she ran across the Mackinac Bridge with approximately 300 other participants. The runners were joined by thousands of others who walked in the annual [Mackinac Bridge Walk](#). In February 2003, the Governor appointed the first-ever state-level surgeon general, Dr. Kimberlydawn Wisdom, to lead the state's public health promotion and disease prevention efforts.

In keeping with Governor Granholm's challenges, Dr. Wisdom and Michigan's DCH have created several programs to encourage and support healthy lifestyles. In late 2004, Dr. Wisdom challenged public health employees to a 16-week [Public Health Steps Up](#) pedometer challenge to see who could walk the most. Participants included Michigan's 45 local health departments, DCH, the Michigan Public Health Institute, and the Michigan Association for Local Public Health. DCH has also created materials to aid individuals in leading healthy lives: [Healthstyle](#) is a brief online self-test, which individuals can take to determine what lifestyle changes could improve their health, and [Fit Kit](#) is a tool that individuals can use to create a personalized weight management plan.

Evaluating and Improving Residents' Health Status

Together, Governor Granholm and Dr. Wisdom have unveiled two documents to evaluate the status of Michigan's health and recommend ways to improve it. The first is [Healthy Michigan 2010](#). Modeled after the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' [Healthy People 2010](#) initiative,

this report is the state's first-ever health status checkup. *Healthy Michigan 2010* identifies concerns about state residents' physical activity rates, concerns that resemble those in many other states:

- Fifty-three percent of adults in the state report participating in physical activity less than the recommended 30 minutes per day. Twenty-four percent participate in no leisure time physical activity at all.
- A third of Michigan students in grades nine through 12 do not participate in the recommended amount of moderate or vigorous physical activity.
- Michigan is experiencing double-digit annual increases in health insurance premiums. More than 70 percent of these health care costs are directly attributable to chronic disease, much of which could be prevented through lifestyle changes.³²

Healthy Michigan 2010 also identifies goals to address these concerns. It serves as a cornerstone document from which Michigan's health-promotion programs will build.

The second report, [*Prescription for a Healthier Michigan*](#), provides recommendations for meeting the goals and was released by Governor Granholm and Dr. Wisdom in May 2004. This report calls upon schools, businesses, health care providers, state and local public health agencies, faith-based institutions, and the community-at-large to promote healthy, active lifestyles. The "prescription" for K-12 schools, for example, challenges them to support healthy eating and physical activity, integrate a comprehensive school health education curriculum into all school programs, adopt a physical education curriculum, and provide opportunities for physical activity during and after school. The report also asks residents and leaders to consider land use and transportation factors when developing health improvement plans. For instance, the community-at-large is asked to assess community policies and the environment using tools such as the Promoting Active Communities assessment mentioned previously³³

Developing Basic Physical Activity Skills Early in Life

Enthusiasm for sports and physical activity is often developed early in life. With this in mind, the Michigan Governor's Council on Physical Fitness, Health, and Sports has developed a detailed program designed to change the way educators think about physical education. Michigan's [*Exemplary Physical Education Curriculum*](#) (EPEC) is a structured curriculum to help physical education instructors improve children's basic motor skills so they can excel in more sophisticated physical activities, such as throwing a ball or tumbling. These competencies are often overlooked in physical education but help children develop confidence in their physical abilities and therefore help them to be active for life.

Sixty-nine percent of Michigan school districts have received training since EPEC's introduction in 1998. Evaluations have revealed that students taught with the curriculum registered better fitness, social behavior, and motor skill scores than a control group, as well as better knowledge of the benefits of activity.³⁴ EPEC has been recognized for achievement in chronic disease prevention by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the State Directors of Chronic Disease Prevention.³⁵ Moreover, because of its successful results, EPEC is one of two chronic disease prevention programs on which CDC is conducting an extensive two-year evaluation expected to be complete in fall 2005.³⁶

Conclusion

This *Issue Brief* illustrates the complex connections between the built environment and physical activity. Because of these connections, a wide range of state policies and programs can help to foster active communities and lifestyles. Michigan's active community policies include:

- development policies that support compact neighborhoods with home, work, school, and other destinations in walking or bicycling distance of one another;
- revitalization policies that invest in older neighborhoods, areas which are often compact and supported by mass transit because they predate the multicar household;
- transportation policies that create safe places to walk and bicycle; and
- open space conservation policies that create and maintain recreational spaces and help discourage unwanted sprawl.

To complement these active community policies, Michigan has also created several health education programs that encourage and provide tools for physical activity throughout a person's life.

Other states may draw lessons from Michigan's policies and programs to help shape their own active community strategies. The range of strategies described in this *Issue Brief* offers state leaders a variety of policy options. Officials focused on economic development, transportation, land use, parks and recreation, agriculture, education, and more can play a role in protecting residents' health. Moreover, although they may not have done so before, these officials can be encouraged to consider the benefits of physical activity when assessing the costs and benefits of their programs. The fact that various state agencies can influence the design of active communities suggests that collaboration among leaders from a number of fields can be highly beneficial.

Note: This *Issue Brief* is available for download for free at www.NGA.org/Center.

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