

COMMUNITY SIDEWALK AUDIT IS THE FIRST STEP IN PROMOTING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN MURPHYSBORO, ILLINOIS

ILLINOIS STATE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND NUTRITION PROGRAM SUCCESS STORY

AT-A-GLANCE

The Jackson County Health Department, Active Transportation Alliance, and the town of Murphysboro worked together in support of promoting physical activity. On August 3rd 2019, 31 volunteers identified and assessed the presence and condition of the city's sidewalks for the Murphysboro Sidewalk Audit. The audit was the first step in developing a plan for community leaders to prioritize sidewalk improvements that will help make the streets safer for all residents. Murphysboro, Illinois is the second largest city in Jackson County, Illinois and has 7,568 residents.



PUBLIC HEALTH CHALLENGE

The Southern Illinois Healthcare's 2018 Community Health Needs Assessment and Implementation Strategy identified 26.7% of Jackson County residents experienced no leisure time physical activity during the past month, including running, gardening, golfing, or walking for exercise. The assessment also reports that over half of Jackson County residents are overweight or obese.¹ Simple physical activities, like walking, can be the first step towards weight management and living a healthier lifestyle. Walking is an easy way for adults to incorporate physical activity into their lives. In order to make this change, residents need to have the systems and infrastructure in place. Built environment changes like sidewalk improvements can lead to changes in individual behavior such as increasing physical activity, which in turn can lead to managing weight and reducing risk for obesity related diseases.

APPROACH

Through the Illinois State Physical Activity and Nutrition program, the town of Murphysboro partnered with the Jackson County Health Department and Active Transportation Alliance for their technical assistance and support in a project to prioritize potential investments for sidewalk repairs. The team determined that a sidewalk audit was the best strategy to begin this. Active Transportation Alliance developed a sidewalk gap analysis by mapping current sidewalk conditions via Google Streetview and determined which areas needed a visual inspection. The Jackson County Health Department organized and recruited community residents to volunteer for the audit. Each volunteer received an event t-shirt and a \$10 voucher for the Murphysboro Farmers Market. Over 30 residents helped assess Murphysboro sidewalks. Participants were taught to classify the condition of sidewalks along a block and crosswalks at intersections.



ISPAN is made possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in collaboration with the Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity, administered by the Illinois Public Health Institute



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[The sidewalk audit] was a great success and a way to help build a healthier community. Not to mention provided some much needed information about the status of our sidewalks throughout Murphysboro.

- Will Stephens, Mayor of Murphysboro

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RESULTS

Volunteers confirmed the condition of 125 miles of sidewalks and documented new issues and recommendations. Volunteers were taught a new technical skill and shown how their individual actions can make a difference in their community. Active Transportation Alliance will use the findings to present recommendations to the mayor on how to update and complete a safe and activity-friendly sidewalk network in Murphysboro.

WHAT'S NEXT

Through this community audit, the Jackson County Health Department and town of Murphysboro were able to engage community residents and begin the first steps to improving the city's sidewalks. Using the sidewalk audit results, the prioritization plan will help city officials determine their focus for future built environment projects. Participants were also given the opportunity to attend Bike Walk Every Town, a community advocacy workshop program, hosted by Active Transportation Alliance.² The Jackson County Health Department and Active Transportation Alliance will continue their work and partnership to help make sidewalks safe and accessible for all.

¹ Southern Illinois Hospital (2018). 2018 Community Health Needs Assessment and Implementation Strategy. Retrieved from https://www.hsidn.org/uploads/6/6/8/7/66873073/sih_chna_2018.pdf

² Active Transportation Alliance. Bike Walk Every Town. Retrieved from <https://activetrans.org/our-work/bicycling/bike-walk-every-town>

ABOUT ISPAN

ISPAN is a five-year, \$4.6 million initiative to implement physical activity and nutrition interventions designed to make it easier for Illinoisans to live the healthiest lives possible. ISPAN is particularly focused on low-income and rural communities and communities of color that have been the hardest hit by chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes and heart disease. With funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Illinois Public Health Institute is collaborating with the Illinois Department of Public Health, local health departments in three regions of the state, and a unified coalition of organizations from multiple sectors to tackle the root causes of obesity.

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