

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

On August 3, 2019, residents in Murphysboro, Illinois volunteered to identify and assess the presence and condition of the city's sidewalks for the Murphysboro Sidewalk Audit conducted by the town of Murphysboro, the Jackson County Health Department, and Active Transportation Alliance. The audit was the first part of developing a plan for community leaders to prioritize sidewalk improvements to help make the streets safer and more activity-friendly for all residents. The resulting Sidewalk Inventory Plan is now guiding local investments in sidewalk infrastructure in Murphysboro.



PUBLIC HEALTH CHALLENGE

With just over a quarter (26.7%) of Jackson County residents reporting no leisure time physical activity during the past month in the 2018 Southern Illinois Healthcare Community Health Needs Assessment¹, promoting easy and affordable options for physical activity that can be integrated into daily life is a critical strategy for improving physical activity levels in the region. In Jackson County, Illinois, over half of the residents are overweight or obese. In Murphysboro, located in Jackson County, about 18% of residents live below the poverty line, with a median household income of \$36,000 a year (the Illinois median household income is \$63,000), making it important to ensure there are affordable or free physical activity options like walking and running.² Ensuring there are safe and accessible sidewalks can help promote physical activity as people move about their daily lives. Increased physical activity can help reduce overweight and obesity and the risk of related chronic diseases.

APPROACH

Through the Illinois State Physical Activity and Nutrition (ISPAN) program led by the Illinois Public Health Institute, the town of Murphysboro partnered with the Jackson County Health Department (JCHD) and Active Transportation Alliance (ATA) to provide technical assistance and support for a project to prioritize potential investments in repairing and completing the Murphysboro sidewalk network. The team determined a sidewalk audit could engage the community to develop a sidewalk investment prioritization plan. ATA developed a sidewalk analysis by mapping current sidewalk conditions and gaps via Google Streetview and determined which areas needed a visual inspection. The JCHD organized and recruited community residents to volunteer for the audit through social media, and a TV advert. Each volunteer received an event t-shirt and a \$10 voucher to the Murphysboro Farmers Market. 31 residents signed up to volunteer and 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





[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



RESULTS

Volunteers confirmed the condition of 125 miles of sidewalks and documented new issues and recommendations. Residents were taught new technical skills and shown how their individual actions can make a difference in their community. Using the audit results, ATA created the Murphysboro Sidewalk Inventory Plan which highlights the sidewalk audit process, a sidewalk inventory and condition analysis, and identified where to prioritize improvements for future implementation. The report was given to the city council and mayor to help guide city leaders on sidewalk repairs. In March 2020, the Murphysboro City Council adopted the sidewalk inventory plan. The plan will help the city leaders determine where first to use grant money earmarked for sidewalk repair and help apply for future funding opportunities.

WHAT'S NEXT

Through the community audit, partners were able to engage community residents and begin the first steps to improving the city's sidewalks. Volunteers were also given the opportunity to attend Bike Walk Every Town, a community advocacy workshop program to strengthen biking and walking in their community.³ The sidewalk prioritization plan will continue to help city officials determine their focus for current and future built environment projects. Earlier this summer, Murphysboro constructed 2,300 square feet of sidewalk with plans to do an additional 2,500 square feet of sidewalk by building curb cuts and repairing and installing new sidewalks in key priority areas identified in the plan, including connecting a local neighborhood with a food pantry. This new and updated sidewalk infrastructure will create a safe and activity-friendly sidewalk network and provide residents the opportunity to have a healthier lifestyle. Spurred by this walk audit, ATA and JCHD are now working with the City of Carbondale to conduct a bike audit of the city's bike paths. The JCHD and ATA will continue their work and partnership in Southern Illinois to help create safe, accessible, and walkable communities.

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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¹Southern 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

²Active Transportation Alliance. Paving the way to safer streets. Retrieved from <https://activetrans.org/blog/paving-the-way-to-safer-streets>

³Active Transportation Alliance. Bike Walk Every Town. Retrieved from <https://activetrans.org/ourwork/bicycling/bike-walk-every-town>