



## Research Brief

### Municipal Officials' Participation in Built Environment Policy Development



#### Overview

The UMass Worcester Prevention Research Center, located at UMass Medical School in Worcester, MA, is a member of the CDC's Prevention Research Center (PRC) network. Our work promotes healthy lifestyles through increased opportunities for physical activity, healthy eating and healthy weight. For more information, visit: [www.umassmed.edu/prc](http://www.umassmed.edu/prc)

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The design of a town or city influences how physically active people are in the community. For example, people are more likely to ride a bicycle if there are safe places to ride, such as bike lanes on city streets. They are more likely to walk if there are safe sidewalks and parks. Local elected officials and appointed municipal employees make decisions on how buildings, streets, sidewalks, and parks, are designed and maintained. This study examined how different municipal officials participate in making policy decisions that can increase how physically active people can be in the community. The study looked especially at how public health officials, who have the most interest in promoting physical activity, are involved with these decisions.

#### Main Questions

- How are municipal officials involved in making policy decisions about land, roads, and parks that can affect physical activity?
- What differences are there among different job positions involved in making these decisions?
- What factors influence municipal officials' involvement in these decisions?

#### Study

The study used a Web-based survey to reach out to elected and appointed municipal officials from 94 cities with 50,000 or more residents in 8 states (Colorado, Georgia, Hawaii, Kansas, Massachusetts, Missouri, North Carolina, and West Virginia). Elected officials included positions such as mayors and city councilors. Appointed officials included city/town managers, and heads of departments, such as planning, community development, and public health. A total of 453 elected and appointed municipal officials from 83 municipalities participated in the survey.

#### The Bottom Line

Creating communities that promote physical activity requires collaboration across many sectors of local government. This study found that most municipal employees surveyed have helped make policy decisions that can increase physical activity. Public health employees participated the least in making decisions related to land use, transportation, and public works, and had among the lowest participation with policies related to parks and recreation. They also reported having the least amount of experience making park and recreation policies.

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Photo by Kristen Langford [www.pedbikeimages.org](http://www.pedbikeimages.org)

#### Spotlight on Results

- Most officials reported participating in policies related to land use (74.2%), and parks and recreation (64.2%)
- Public health employees reported the lowest participation on land use (29%) and transportation (42.1%) and among the lowest participation on policies related to parks and recreation (26.3%)
- Public health employees reported the least amount of experience in policy development

#### Call for Action

Public health officials can play an important role in making policy decisions regarding the built environment. Public health officials need increased training on how to participate in policy decisions.

#### Source

Lemon SC, Goins KV, Schneider KL, Brownson RC, Valko CA, Evenson KR, Eyler AA, Heinrich KM, Litt J, Lyn R, Reed HL, Tompkins NO, Maddock J. Municipal Officials' Participation in Built Environment Policy Development in the United States. Am J Health Promot. 2015 Sep-Oct;30(1):42-49. Epub 2014 Nov 5. PubMed PMID: 25372234. doi:10.4278/ajhp.131021-QUAN-536

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