

Making Strides: 2020 State Report Cards

How to Use Your State's Report Card on Walking, Biking, and Physical Activity



Making Strides: State Report Cards on Walking, Bicycling, and Active Kids and Communities

The new 2020 full report, [Making Strides: State Report Cards on Walking, Bicycling, and Active Kids and Communities](#), provides a detailed explanation of how the states were graded; an overview of the research that supports walking, bicycling, and physical activity as ways to improve health; a discussion of the rationale for state-level report cards; and reflections on the support for physical activity in different regions and our country as a whole.

The 2020 Making Strides state report cards evaluate each state on 28 indicators spanning four core topic areas that focus on key areas for state action to promote and support physical activity. The state report cards help us understand at a glance how each state is doing in supporting healthy and active kids and adults, and where there is room for improvement, making it easier to take action in support of healthier communities.

This fact sheet provides tips on how to use your state's report card. It sets out key points you can use in communicating the importance of state support for walking, biking, and physical activity, provides steps to consider in using the report card, and highlights ideas to inspire change in your state.

Why State Support for Walking, Bicycling, and Physical Activity Matters

Physical Activity Matters

- Studies have shown that physical activity is important for everyone.¹ Physical activity has a variety of benefits, including reducing risk of stroke, high blood pressure, diabetes, some cancers, premature death, and depression.²
- More walking, bicycling, and physical activity can also provide an increased sense of community and less social isolation, higher cognitive functioning, less air pollution and fewer climate changing emissions.³
- Physical inactivity and obesity do not affect all communities equally. These conditions, which can affect quality of life and lead to premature mortality, are disproportionately prevalent in low-income communities and communities of color.⁴ Black and Latinx youth have higher rates of obesity than white and Asian American youth.⁵

Americans Aren't Getting Enough Physical Activity

- Only 54 percent of American adults are meeting the aerobic component of the physical activity guidelines and a scant 24 percent are meeting the recommended levels of overall physical activity.⁶
- Less than one-quarter (24 percent) of children 6 to 17 years of age participate in 60 minutes of physical activity every day.⁷ Physical activity rates were higher for boys than girls, and higher for white students than for African American students.⁸

Walking, Biking, Public Transportation, and Parks Help Americans Get the Physical Activity They Need for Health

- Walking and bicycling are key ways in which people can get sufficient physical activity as part of their daily lives. For example, almost one-third of transit users get their entire recommended amount of physical activity just by walking to and from transit stops.⁹ Conversely, people who travel by car are more sedentary, which is associated with chronic disease and premature death.¹⁰
- People who live in more multimodal communities (places that support getting around by a variety of modes – walking, bicycling, and public transportation) exercise more and are less likely to be overweight than those who live in automobile-oriented communities.¹¹
- Adults who get around by walking or bicycling have lower weight and blood pressure, and are less likely to become diabetic.¹²
- Access to places for physical activity, such as parks, playgrounds, community centers, and other recreational facilities, increase the likelihood of youth and adults being physically active. Studies show that people who live closer to parks are more likely to visit parks and be physically active more often than those who live further from parks.¹³
- States with the highest levels of bicycling and walking have the lowest rates of obesity, high blood pressure, and diabetes.¹⁴



Photo: Ty Schmidt

Steps for Using Your State's Report Card

Now that you have your state's report card, what can you do?

1. Ask these questions:

- **How did my state score?** Look at your state's overall score and grade, as well as the scores and grades for each core topic area.
- **Where is my state doing well?** In many cases, individual states have focused efforts and resources in one or more of the core topic areas. Recognize areas where the state scored well. Every state has made some commitment to healthier, active communities. If your state has a policy or plan in place in one of the topic areas, speak with the responsible agency to understand how it is being implemented and see if improvements can be made.
- **Where can my state improve?** Take a look at the areas where your state scored poorly. What changes would you like to see in these areas?
- **How has my state's score changed since 2016 and 2018?** Look at the indicators where your state's score has changed. These changes may reflect positive progress in specific areas that should be recognized. Declining scores may indicate areas where additional attention is needed.

2. Focus on one or two specific areas where you would like to see change.

Think about those areas that may have “low hanging fruit,” where there is fairly easy potential for change. Also consider areas

where more significant efforts will need to be made to effect change, but where the change will have widespread benefits.

3. Identify and connect with partners who may be working on the same or similar issues.

Change generally requires collaboration. Who might those partners be? Think about the following groups:

- Hospital/health system
- American Heart Association
- American Cancer Society
- American Medical Association
- Local or state YMCAs
- Local Boys & Girls Clubs
- School associations
- Faith-based organizations
- Community coalitions

4. Make change!

Of course, making change is actually a multi-step process. Changing policies and creating healthier communities requires forming a coalition, identifying decisionmakers, crafting a proposal, and creating pressure and momentum for change. While the steps to successfully change policies, funding, and practices will vary based on the topic area and level of government, using the activities and strategies below will support your work for healthy, vibrant communities.

Ideas for Activities and Strategies to Promote Change

- Bring media attention to the issue. Undertake a media campaign that focuses on areas where the state could improve and specific actions that the state could take.
- Use [social media](#) to spread your message widely.
- Engage local elected officials to encourage changes at the state level. Develop a mayors' sign-on letter or a municipal resolution to voice official local support for your issue.
- Speak with staff from the state departments working most closely on your topic of interest to understand potential for supportive administrative changes.
- If your state is developing a bicycle or pedestrian plan, physical activity plan, or other state-level plan, determine how you can participate and work to include specific goals and objectives that support healthier, active communities.
- If there has been success in improving one area, think about working with partners to expand efforts to promote change in a related area. For example, if your state recently adopted a Complete Streets policy, but scored poorly in the Federal and State Active Transportation Funding section, reach out to Complete Streets advocates to begin to address funding.
- Work with partners to adopt a local Complete Streets or other policy that supports walking, biking, or physical activity.
- Work with community members to document and share neighborhood concerns and strengths through a [Photovoice](#) project.
- Engage youth in developing a local or state campaign to advocate for changes they are most concerned with.



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