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## Creating or Improving Access to Places for Physical Activity is Strongly Recommended to Increase Physical Activity

Regular physical activity is associated with a healthier, longer life. Physically active people have a lower risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, and some types of cancer. Despite all the benefits of physical activity, most people in this country are sedentary. Given that regular physical activity helps people enjoy better health, an important question is: what strategies work best in helping people become more physically active?

A systematic review of published studies, conducted on behalf of the Task Force on Community Preventive Services by a team of experts, found that people will become more physically active in response to the creation of or improved access to places for physical activity, combined with distribution of information. Based on this review, **the Task Force issued a strong recommendation to implement such efforts.**

### Background on the Interventions

- These interventions involve the efforts of worksites, coalitions, agencies, and communities in attempts to change the local environment to create opportunities for physical activity.
- Such changes include creating walking trails, building exercise facilities, or providing access to existing nearby facilities.
- Many of these programs also train participants to use the equipment and offer health behavior education, risk factor screening, referrals to physicians or additional services, health and fitness programs, and support or buddy systems. These multicomponent programs were evaluated as a “combined package” because it was not possible to separate out the effects of each individual component.

### Findings from the Systematic Review

- In all 10 studies reviewed, creating or enhancing access to places for physical activity was effective in getting people to exercise more.
- The median estimates from the reviewed studies suggest that creating or improving access to places for physical activity can result in a 25% increase in the percent of persons who exercise at least 3 times a week.
- Most of the studies also reported weight losses or decreases in body fat among program participants.
- These interventions were effective among both men and women and in various settings, including industrial plants, universities, federal agencies, and low-income communities. If appropriately adapted to the target populations, these interventions should be applicable to diverse settings and groups

### Publications:

- **MMWR/Recommendations and Reports** – October 26, 2001/Vol. 50/ No. RR-18. A report on findings.
- **American Journal of Preventive Medicine** – Am J Prev Med 2002; 22 (4S); 73-102. A report on evidence and findings.

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The **Guide to Community Preventive Services** (Community Guide) provides recommendations on population-based interventions to promote health and to prevent disease, injury, disability, and premature death, appropriate for use by communities and healthcare systems. For more information about the Community Guide (including links to publications and a variety of resources) see

[www.thecommunityguide.org](http://www.thecommunityguide.org) and for more information about the physical activity review see [www.thecommunityguide.org/pa/](http://www.thecommunityguide.org/pa/).

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