

Researchers identify key indicators for activity-friendly communities

October 31 2006

There is no doubt that people can benefit from regular physical activity. There is also no doubt that Americans do not get enough exercise. While there is a long list of policies and methods that might increase participation, advocates, community leaders, and researchers lack the tools needed to assess local barriers to and opportunities for more active, healthy lifestyles.

In a study published in the December 2006 issue of the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, researchers used a systematic review process to identify key indicators of activity-friendly communities that can be used to assess and improve opportunities for regular physical activity.

By searching peer-reviewed journals, reports and websites, the authors identified 230 potential factors that might be used to assess activity-friendly communities. Then, using a consensus-building approach among experts drawn from a wide range of institutions, government agencies, and not-for-profits, they identified ten key indicators that could serve as the foundation of efforts to design activity-friendly communities.

Example indicators include land use policies that favor closer distances between home and shopping. Interesting things to look at while walking was important, as was a clean and safe environment.

Writing in the article, Laura Brennan Ramirez, PhD, MPH, states, "These findings represent an important first step in the identification of

practical and empirical indicators that can be used to assess and improve the degree to which communities support routine physical activity. This initial set of indicators can serve as the basis for further study of physical activity indicators in different populations (e.g., older adults, children, women, racial and ethnic minorities) and settings (e.g., urban, rural, schools, worksites, healthcare facilities, faith-based organizations)."

Source: Elsevier Health Sciences

Citation: Researchers identify key indicators for activity-friendly communities (2006, October 31) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2006-10-key-indicators-activity-friendly.html>

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