

Less sprawl equals better quality of life

April 3 2014, by Reid Ewing



Credit: Smart Growth America

A new report shows positive economic and health benefits for those living in more compact metropolitan areas. The study was released today by Smart Growth America and authored by Reid Ewing, director of the Metropolitan Research Center at the University of Utah.

People in compact, connected metropolitan regions are more likely to

move up the economic ladder, have lower household costs, enjoy more transportation choices and lead longer, safer, healthier lives according to a new report out today by Smart Growth America.

Measuring Sprawl 2014 evaluates development in 221 major metropolitan areas in the United States, and ranks these areas based on how sprawling or compact they are. The report also examines how sprawl relates to life in those communities, based on factors like [economic mobility](#), the cost of housing and transportation, life expectancy, obesity, chronic disease and safety.

"Smart growth strategies are about making life better for everyone in a community," said Geoff Anderson, President and CEO of Smart Growth America. "If policymakers are looking for ways to lower costs for their constituents, improve public health and support their broader economy, they need to be thinking about how to improve their development."

"This is the most extensive study to date to define and measure the costs and benefits of sprawl development," said Reid Ewing, Director of the University of Utah's Metropolitan Research Center and primary author of the new research. "We found that as a region's scores improved—that is, as an area sprawled less—several quality of life factors improved along with them, including greater economic mobility, lower combined costs of housing and transportation and higher life expectancies. This research demonstrates the many ways our development decisions impact us every day, and informs how better development practices can improve our quality of life."

"This report will have a strong influence on the next decade of research concerning relationships between the built environment, urban planning, and health both in the US and worldwide," said David Berrigan of the National Institutes of Health, which sponsored the research. "Sustainable behavior change involving diet, weight and physical activity has proved

difficult to achieve through individual level interventions. Dr. Ewing's focus on urban sprawl as a modifiable environmental factor correlated with obesity, physical activity and environmental exposures is an important element of how we can place health criteria in planning decisions on a stronger and more evidence based footing."

More information: The rankings and report are available online:
www.smartgrowthamerica.org/measuring-sprawl

Provided by University of Utah

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