

Research links built characteristics of environment with health of persons with SCI

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Scientists in disability outcomes research have determined that differences in the built characteristics of communities may influence the health and wellbeing of residents with chronic spinal cord injury (SCI). This study suggested that among New Jersey residents with SCI, residing in communities with more heterogeneous land use was less beneficial to their perceived health. The article, Differences in the community built environment influence poor perceived health among persons with spinal cord injury, was published in *Archives of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation*.

The authors are Amanda Botticello, PhD, MPH, of Kessler Foundation, Tanya Rohrbach, MS, of Raritan Valley Community College, Branchburg, NJ, and Nicole Cobbold, BS, of the Penn Graduate School of Education.

"We found that living in areas with greater mixed land use (residential, commercial, industrial, recreational) was associated with poorer perceived health among people with SCI in New Jersey" said Dr. Botticello, senior research scientist in Outcomes & Assessment Research at Kessler Foundation. "This contrasts with studies in the general population, which appears to benefit from living in more populated areas with mixed land use. What benefits the healthy population may not benefit people with limited mobility, such as individuals with SCI."

Studies have shown that neighborhood characteristics such as open space, mixed land use, ,condition/proximity/accessibility of

infrastructure (e.g., parks, sidewalks, recreational facilities, transportation) influences physical activity and health among people in the general population. However, few studies have investigated the relevance of these community characteristics on the health and well-being for persons with disabilities, including SCI. This study was based on survey data from the federally funded Spinal Cord Injury System (SCIMS) database (n=503) and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data.

"Understanding the relationship between disability and the environment is essential to supporting optimal adjustment and outcomes in vulnerable populations," concluded Dr. Botticello. "Including community risk factors in future investigations may help improve health and [wellbeing](#) by identifying individuals at risk for poorer outcomes."

Provided by Kessler Foundation

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