



government

Statewide government data were collected from four state departments through internet searches and interviews with key informants. Program directors with knowledge of physical activity related issues were interviewed from each department for a completion rate of 100%.

The three most populated cities, Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau, took part in the telephone surveys, but were also chosen for in-depth study through the key informant process to determine the impact on physical activity each city has on its region. Mayors, city managers, and/or parks and recreation directors of all three cities participated in the interviews.

Local government data were obtained from the incorporated cities of Alaska via telephone survey. Only incorporated cities were selected to be surveyed in the community section because they are more likely than unincorporated cities to develop policies, create programs, and provide environmental supports for physical activity due to the fact that they have a structured government system and are able to levy taxes. Surveyors were able to reach city managers or mayors of 149 of the 150 incorporated cities for a response rate of 99%.

State Government

The State of Alaska has four departments that promote physical activity to help meet health, recreation, education, and transportation needs of Alaskans. The Departments of Health and Social Services, Transportation and Public Facilities, Education and Early Development, and Natural Resources have all created policies, programs, and/or environmental supports promoting physical activity. Because information about the Department of Education and Early Development will be presented in the Schools section, the following summarizes the work of the other three departments relating to physical activity.

Together, these three departments have seventeen policies and thirteen programs with a physical activity component. These policies and programs complement the many roads, walking and bicycling paths, trails, parks, and other facilities built and managed by these state government departments. A summary of policies, programs, and environmental supports associated with state government can be found in the appendix.

Regional Municipalities

The following information summarizes important policies, programs, and environmental supports for physical activity in Juneau, Fairbanks, and Anchorage, which together account for more than half (51.7%) of Alaskan residents. ⁴



Each of the three has developed a comprehensive plan to guide the development of its city in the coming years. Within these comprehensive plans are transportation, land-use, and design policies that have an impact on the physical activity levels of citizens.

The Anchorage Comprehensive Plan, with twenty-seven policies specifically relating to things that help people be more active, is the most detailed of the three. Its land use concept plan provides a vision for the development of the Anchorage Bowl that includes “Town Centers” where housing, retail shops, offices, and public facilities are all located within close proximity of each other, allowing for increased pedestrian and bicycle use, and therefore, increased physical activity.

Juneau, and to a lesser extent Fairbanks, have also developed policies within their comprehensive plan that address physical activity. The Juneau plan contains eleven such policies, while Fairbanks has five. Many of the Juneau policies are related to non-motorized transportation. In fact, the City and Borough of Juneau has developed a “Non-Motorized Transportation Plan” that specifically addresses the needs of bicycles and pedestrians to ensure inclusion of appropriate facilities for them in the future.

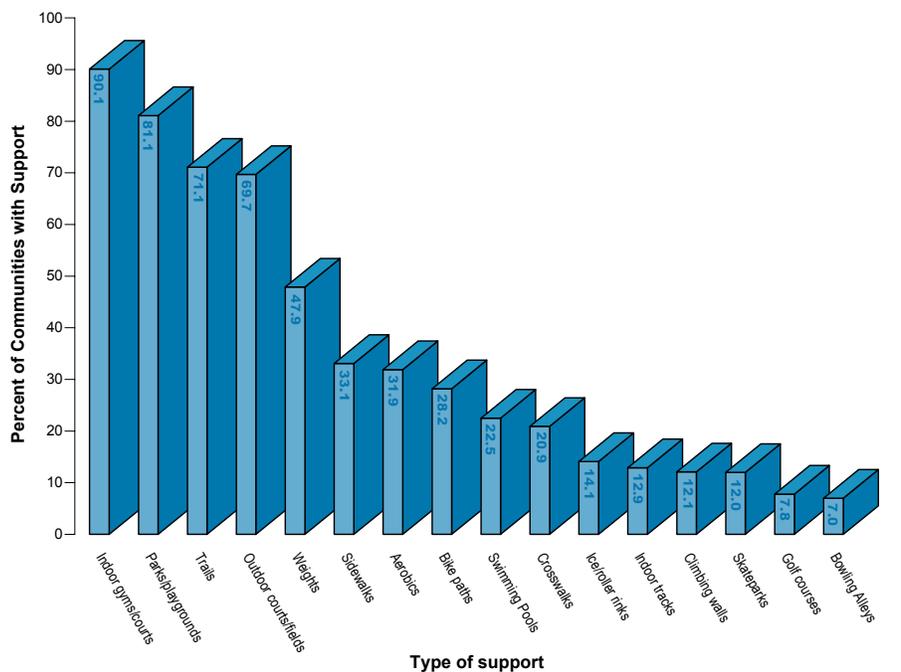
The most common way for city governments to provide physical activity opportunities for their residents is through their parks and recreation departments. Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau all provide recreation programs and environmental supports through these departments each of which is guided by a parks and recreation comprehensive plan. Combined, these three parks and recreation departments manage over 297 parks, 250 miles of trails, and 80 recreational facilities. Each department offers recreational programs unique to their area based on climate, resources, and public needs and interests. Programs for children, teens, adults, and seniors are found in each community.



Local Municipalities

To find out how communities in Alaska address the physical activity needs of their citizens, we developed and administered the following telephone survey to 149 of the 150 incorporated cities in Alaska.

Figure 2. Physical activity supports in Alaskan Communities



Question #1 – Which of the following public or private facilities are available in your city?

Results: As shown in Figure 2, the most common physical activity supports in Alaskan communities are indoor gyms/courts (128), public parks/playgrounds (116), trails (101), and outdoor courts/fields (99).

Less than half of the surveyed communities report the presence of sidewalks (47), aerobics facilities (45), bike paths/lanes (40), swimming pools (32), or cross walks (29). Facilities such as ice/roller skate rinks (20), climbing walls (17), skate parks (17), golf courses (11), and bowling alleys (10), are scarce.

Discussion:

Due to the fact that over half (51.7%) of Alaskans live in the three urban hubs of Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau, it is likely that over half of Alaskans have access to many of the environmental supports for physical activity listed above. Combined with the other 17 urban cities of Alaska (those having 2,500 persons or more) a full 64% of Alaskans should have a variety of facilities and programs available to them for physical activity. It is



important to note, however, that the 36% (approx. 223,920 people) of Alaskans who live in rural or unincorporated cities are likely to have only a gymnasium, parks/playgrounds, trails, and outdoor courts/fields to use for recreation. For Alaskans living in these places, the only indoor facility for physical activity is most likely the local school gymnasium, which may or may not be available to the general public.

Question #2 - In general, are the recreation areas listed above: 1) Open during weekdays? 2) Open on weekends? 3) Open during evenings? 4) Accessible by public transportation? 5) Well maintained? 6) Supervised? 7) Overcrowded? 8) Underutilized?

Results: In general, the 149 communities surveyed for this project indicated a positive response for the “usability” of recreational facilities in their community with 133 respondents reporting that in general, their facilities are open during weekdays, 121 reporting facilities open during evening hours, and 107 reporting facilities open on weekends. In addition, 125 respondents indicate that facilities are reportedly well maintained, 117 say facilities are supervised, 31 report facilities being overcrowded, and 38 say facilities are underutilized.

Question #3- Does your community have policies, regulations, or a permit process that requires new residential or commercial developments to: 1) include bicycle lanes or paths? 2) Include sidewalks? 3) Include bike or walk paths that connect neighborhoods?

Results: Only 7 cities surveyed indicate that they have a policy requiring the inclusion of bike paths/lanes with construction of new residential or commercial developments, and 13 cities have a policy requiring sidewalks to be constructed in new developments. Seven communities also say that their community has a policy requiring bike or walking paths that connect neighborhoods.

Question #4 – How many events promoting or involving physical activity did your city sponsor or co-sponsor in the past year?

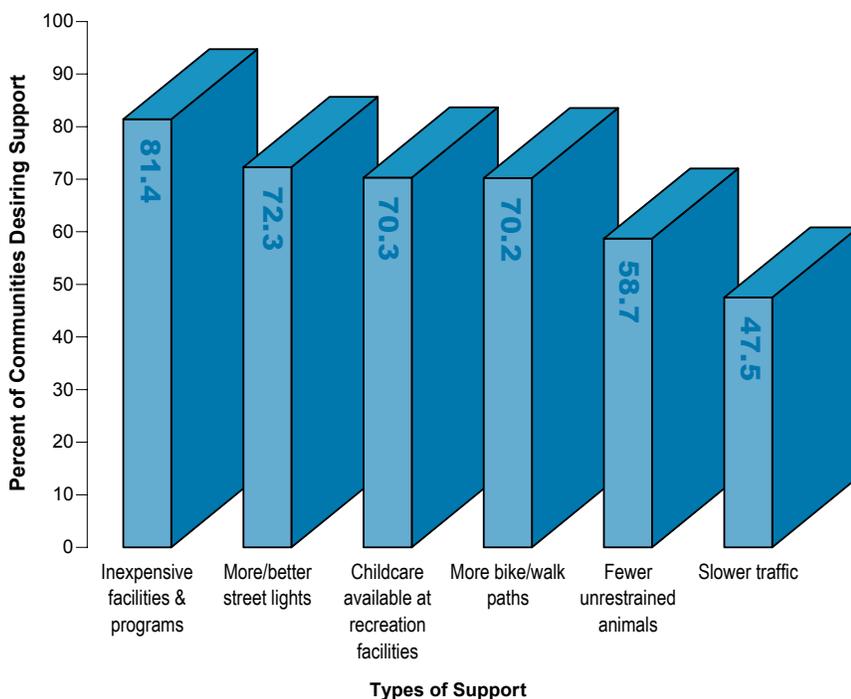
Results: The number of physical activity related events sponsored by Alaskan cities varied greatly. Forty-one communities did not sponsor any events. Eleven sponsored five or more events. The remaining communities fell somewhere in the middle, sponsoring or co-sponsoring between one and four events annually.

Question #5 – Which of the following physical activity related community improvements do you believe a significant portion of residents in your community would be interested in?



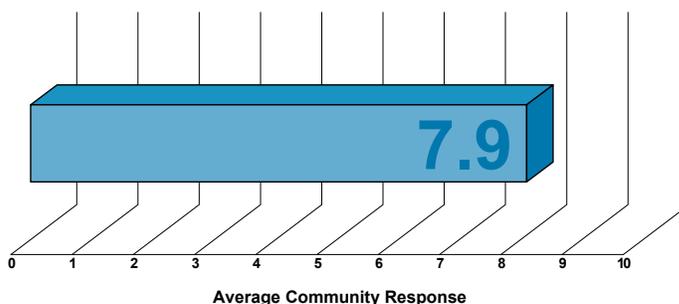
Results: The most commonly desired community improvements are more inexpensive recreational facilities and programs (114), better street lighting (102), availability of childcare at recreational facilities (97), and more bike/walk paths (99).

Figure 3. Physical activity-Related Improvements in Alaskan Communities



Question #6 – Given your city’s various priorities, how interested would you be in discussing ways to improve the overall health status of your community? Please rate your interest level on a scale of 1 to 10.

Figure 4.



Results: The interest level (on a scale of 1 to 10) of cities in discussing ways to improve the overall health of their citizens tended to be high, as 130 cities indicated a level of 5 or higher with 51 communities indicating an interest score of 10.



Recommendations for Alaskan Communities

Findings from the telephone survey and key informant interviews reveal that Alaskan cities could make some improvements in the physical activity supports they offer. While a few of the larger cities have made considerable efforts to provide physical activity policies, programs, and environmental supports for the health of their residents, more work can be done to make all Alaskan communities “activity friendly.” The following recommendations, accompanied by the survey question prompting the recommendation, are suggested by CDC for communities looking to combat cardiovascular disease:

- ▶ Create policies that require sidewalks, bikeways, greenways, and recreation facilities in new and redeveloped residential and mixed use communities (survey question #3);
- ▶ Increase the number of miles of sidewalks, bike paths and trails per capita (Survey question #1);
- ▶ Increase the number of physical activity related events sponsored by city government (Survey question #4); and
- ▶ Increase the total number of inexpensive physical activity facilities with childcare (Survey question #5).