



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Active Living by Design

In *Active Living by Design*—a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) that ran from 2001 to 2009—25 communities implemented projects designed to revamp the built environment, change public policies and expand programs to make physical activity part of everyday life. The RWJF Board of Trustees authorized the program for up to \$15.5 million.

[Read the full Program Results Report.](#)  
[Learn more on the program's website.](#)

### CONTEXT

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that adults get 30 minutes of moderate physical activity at least five days a week. Although people could accumulate that activity 10 or 15 minutes at a time—such as by walking or biking to school or work, or playing in a park—these opportunities have been engineered out of most people's lives. *Active Living by Design* was part of a suite of programs launched by RWJF in 2001 that sought to address barriers to active living in the built environment, such as a lack of sidewalks, bikeways and trails that provide ready access to schools, shops and workplaces.

### THE PROGRAM

During *Active Living by Design*, 25 communities implemented projects to change the built environment and public policies to make physical activity part of everyday life. The communities did this through interdisciplinary partnerships that integrated health organizations with those from fields such as land-use and urban planning, recreation and parks, and transportation.

Each partnership focused on:

- Providing diverse opportunities for active living, and expanding residents’ access to them
- Eliminating design and policy barriers that reduce opportunities for active living
- Developing programs that expanded public awareness and understanding of the benefits of active living.

RWJF used a “high-touch, low-dollar” approach to the program: providing fairly modest financial support but considerable hands-on technical assistance from the national program office.<sup>1</sup> This approach was designed to facilitate the development of strong partnerships that could sustain the active living work after the RWJF support ended.

## KEY FINDINGS & RESULTS

- **The community partnerships spearheaded or contributed to 188 projects in neighborhoods, downtowns, workplaces, schools and parks designed to create a built environment that fosters physical activity.** The most common projects were street improvements to make pedestrian and bicycle travel safer, including new crosswalks, sidewalks, and bike lanes and parking.
- **The partnerships led or contributed to education and advocacy that produced 115 policies that support active living near schools and in public spaces.** These initiatives included:
  - Municipal or county ordinances, policies or guidelines that promote pedestrian and bike movement, such as new design standards for local streets
  - Funding for pedestrian and bike transportation enhancements
  - Creation of municipal or county boards to advise policy-makers on active living.

The partnerships also helped spearhead 45 planning documents guiding local decision-making related to active living.

- **The partnerships helped organize 115 new or expanded programs to engage people in physical activity, such as walking clubs and programs to encourage children to walk or bicycle to school.** Other projects, such as bicycle recycling (fixing up old bicycles for use by someone else) and education, supported active living indirectly.
- ***Active Living by Design* partnerships leveraged \$256 million in grants, direct contributions, funded government policies and in-kind contributions to support active living.**

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<sup>1</sup> Each partnership received a five-year \$200,000 grant

- **Active Living by Design created a [website](#) with resources, tools and links to support the partnerships and others engaged in active living work nationwide.** Staff and grantees also helped produce a supplement on best practices from the program published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.<sup>2</sup>

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROGRAM**

*Active Living by Design* spearheaded a movement promoting the importance of community design in improving public health, according to Sarah L. Strunk, M.H.A., national program director. Participating communities showed that multidisciplinary partnerships can spur policy and environmental changes to support active living within a relatively short amount of time. “*Active Living by Design* has quickly grown into a movement and a philosophy that millions of people now think is the way to live,” Strunk said.

## **AFTERWARD**

As of April 2011, many *Active Living by Design* partnerships were still in place, although some expanded or modified their focus. In communities where the partnership disbanded, new policies, infrastructure and social norms continued to foster physical activity.

### ***Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities***

*Active Living by Design* and its staff helped inform the design of *Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities*, a \$33 million RWJF program launched in 2008 to expand local opportunities for physical activity and access to healthy, affordable foods for children and families. Six of the nine sites in the initial phase of the program also participated in *Active Living by Design*. Strunk and her team are managing *Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities*.

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#### **Program Management**

National Program Office: School of Public Health at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Program Directors: Richard E. Killingsworth, M.P.H., C.H.E.S., currently deputy director, Nemours Health and Prevention Services, and special advisor, President's Council on Fitness, Sports, and Nutrition (2001 through part of 2005) and Sarah L. Strunk, M.H.A. (2005 on)

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