

Parks Ranked #1

ICMA Survey: Obesity and Role of Local Government

The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) conducted a survey to determine how communities could address the critical and growing issue of obesity at the community level. The role of parks and recreation surfaced as taking the lead in this challenge. Some results of this Active Living Approaches by Local Government, 2004 survey included:

Importance of Physical Activity

- Nearly 67% of managers responding indicated that opportunities for physical activity were important to their residents
- Sixty-five (65) percent agreed that it is very important for government at the local level to encourage and provide physical activity opportunities for residents

Role of Local Government Departments

- Nearly **89%** of the managers responding agreed that community **park and recreation** departments should take the lead in developing communities conducive to active living
- The other departments being prominently mentioned for taking a lead role included planning at 71%, health at 50%, and public works and transportation both receiving 34%

Strategies Currently Implemented

- Nearly 84% of managers responding supported recreation programs that encourage active living in their community
- Nearly 81% work to ensure that physical activity facilities such as youth/senior centers, trails, etc. are accessible and affordable
- Almost 75% encourage community use of school facilities

Important Actions to be Taken (each respondent was asked to identify the top 3 actions of importance)

- Forty-five (44.9) percent indicated that the highest action item to address this issue was the need for developing cohesive systems of parks and trails and accessible neighborhood parks
- Forty percent (39.6) identified establishing processes to assess and improve existing local active living infrastructure, e.g. parks and trails, sidewalk linkages, crosswalks
- Thirty two percent (32.2) believe it is important to establish design guidelines that require neighborhood streets be designed with cyclists and walkers in mind

Perceived Barriers to Active Living Actions

- Sixty-seven (67.3) percent cited funding as being the primary barrier facing communities as they try to promote active living
- Forty (39.7) percent indicated that existing building placement and land use patterns make driving a necessity
- Funding was the overall factor identified in asserting leadership to address community barriers to active living

Source: International City/County Management Association, Active Living Approaches by Local Government, 2004. www.icma.org