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WALKABLE WASHINGTON

Transformation towards walkability is taking place all over the state of Washington. From urban, suburban and small town initiatives, the program showcases the effects of a renewed focus on creating great places for people to walk. The case studies are exceptional projects and programs showcasing how cities, counties, school districts, and community organizations throughout the state are making it safer, easier, and more inviting for people to walk.

WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

We promote walkable communities and empower people throughout Washington to connect to the world by foot.

CASE STUDY

MALL WALKING: A PROGRAM RESOURCE GUIDE

NATIONWIDE; A STUDY BY THE UNIVERSITY OF
WASHINGTON HEALTH PROMOTION RESEARCH CENTER

DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE: Mall walking programs are set up in malls or other locations to provide opportunities for physical activity that address barriers such as neighborhood safety, fear of injury, lack of free water and restrooms, and lack of social support. Walkers usually come in before the facility's regular hours to exercise and often socialize afterwards, and some programs also provide stretching exercises or blood pressure tests. Local examples of mall walking programs are Bellevue Square in partnership with Overlake Hospital and the YMCA, and Woodland Park Zoo with GroupHealth. The University of Washington Health Promotion Research Center conducted a study to better understand mall walking programs and encourage the development of these programs throughout the country. The study had three parts: a systematic review of the literature; audits in five different states of mall features and walkers; and over 50 interviews of walkers, program managers, and mall managers. The result of this research is the Mall Walking Guide, which outlines the benefits of mall walking, program considerations, and program examples. The guide is freely available and online for mall managers and other members of the community such as senior service agencies, parks and recreation, and hospitals.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS: Researchers reported few challenges in implementing the study, but they realized early on that some communities do not have indoor malls

For more information

314 1st Avenue South, Seattle, WA 98104
info@feetfirst.org
206.652.2310
www.feetfirst.org



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available to host a traditional mall walking program. As a result, they expanded their search to non-mall settings, and the report includes examples of other venues like a botanical garden or a zoo and encourages thinking beyond a traditional mall walking program.

COSTS AND FUNDING: Funding was provided by a CDC grant for \$100,000 that paid for the research support, consultant fees, and equipment.

IMPLEMENTATION TIME-FRAME: The project was completed in one year. The interview guide and evaluation tool were completed before the interviews and audits. Audits were conducted over a period of about three months from February to April.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: Audits and interviews took place in five different states for diversity in geographic locations and ethnic groups. The University of Washington partnered with University of Illinois, West Virginia University, Washington University in St. Louis, and University of Alaska so that researchers could study examples in their respective communities. There was also a project advisory group which included representatives from organizations such as Senior Services, Easter Seals, Walk with a Doc, National Council on Aging, YMCA, and the Arthritis Foundation. The group advised on the interview process and how to best develop the guide to be a useful product.

BENEFITS AND RESULTS: Although it is unknown how many programs exist or how many participate nationwide, the dissemination

of information and research findings from this study has increased interest in mall walking among public and professional audiences. The Mall Walking Guide has been published and is available for free online. The CDC circulated the guide to a mailing list of 800,000 subscribers, and the Surgeon General included the resource on his front page and also invited a representative from the International Council of Shopping Centers as a keynote speaker for the launch of the Call to Action to Promote Walking and Walkable Communities. There were news stories on TV (King 5), public radio (KUOW), and a magazine (Newsweek) to bring public awareness to the activity of mall walking. The researchers also published in multiple journals and presented at national meetings with the American Public Health Association and the Gerontological Society of America.

CONTACTS:

Basia Belza, PhD, RN, FAAN
Health Promotion Research Center, School of Nursing, University of Washington

RESOURCES:

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