



All Communities Deserve Safe Places to Play and be Active

Everyone should have access to safe places to play and be physically active. The evidence is clear: regular physical activity is critical for healthy mental and physical development, chronic disease prevention, and reducing healthcare costs. Our ability to be active is determined, in large part, by the places in which we live, learn, work, and play. In both rural and urban areas, essential ingredients for physical activity include: safe, well-maintained paths and sidewalks; clean, well-lit parks; accessible school playgrounds; affordable public transit; quality physical education and places to which people can safely walk and bike.

The State is facing tough budgetary decisions, but cutting resources for parks, playgrounds and open spaces is a short-sighted approach. Infrastructure for physical activity is the backbone of a prosperous, equitable, safe and healthy State. Parks, open space and activity-promoting infrastructure are core to our economic development, the environment, health, equity, and community safety. A 2006 study found that California spent \$20.2 billion on costs attributable to lost productivity and healthcare due to physical inactivity. That same study estimated conservatively that costs associated with unhealthy eating and inactivity would rise to \$52.7 billion in 2011. Investments in physical activity infrastructure should distribute resources more equitably, reduce traffic congestion, increase community livability, use land more efficiently—and they can benefit local economic development by increasing residential and commercial property values.

Elected representatives, regional decision makers, and community leaders should collaborate with education, parks and recreation, business, transportation, health and public safety organizations to maintain and improve existing resources and create new opportunities for safe and accessible play and recreation. By working together, we can forge joint solutions to transform neighborhoods into safe and healthy communities in which all children and adults have access to safe places to play and be active. This vision can become a reality if we:

I.

Invest in Parks, Playgrounds and Open Spaces

Californians who live, work and go to schools within walking distance of a park engage in higher levels of physical activity than those who do not have safe or convenient access. Government leaders, funders and advocates can protect and enhance public investments in parks and open space, if they:

- **Prioritize operation and maintenance of existing parks** and open space within city, county, and special districts state agencies.
- **Ensure that when new funds become available for parks and open space**, they address current park inequities by prioritizing those resources in park-poor communities.
- **Provide and protect funding for staff and programming** in Parks and Recreation Departments.
- **Prevent the closure of existing state and local parks and playgrounds** by collaborating with community residents and partner agencies to pool resources and steward public infrastructure.



II.

Maximize Use of Existing Community Resources

Communities with limited parks and open spaces must rely on existing assets and maximize resources like school grounds or vacant lots to provide safe places for physical activity. School facilities can fill a gap by providing local opportunities for regular physical activity during and after school. School facility managers, community leaders, and city and state agency staff should:

- **Develop and enforce joint use agreements** that spell out the terms of shared use of parks, playgrounds, and school facilities by city, county, special districts, and state entities.
- **Modify school grounds to allow safe after-hours and weekend use by community.**
- **Create community gardens** to promote children's physical activity while increasing access to healthy food.
- **Repurpose vacant lots and (where safe) brownfields** to transform open spaces for play.

III.

Promote Safe and Active Transportation

Communities that are walkable have sidewalks, safe intersections, accessible destinations, and green spaces. They reduce the need for automobile use, and tend to be more vibrant. Children who walk or bike to school are more physically active overall than those who commute by car. To enhance the safety of school routes and increase the presence of sidewalks and paths, school administrators, parents, and transit agency staff can:

- **Continue Department of Transportation funding for Safe Routes to School (SRTS)** programs and policies, and implement strategies to help low-resource schools apply and be competitive for state and federal SRTS grants.
- **Incorporate health and equity** criteria into all community infrastructure projects and state grant-making.
- **Implement the State's complete streets policy** to ensure that roads are safe and accessible for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users of all ages and abilities; and require state-funded projects to result in complete streets.
- **Partner with local planning authorities and environmental protection** groups to build sustainable community strategies that consider the health, equity and safety of all communities.

IV.

Provide Quality Physical Activity and Physical Education Opportunities During and After School

Opportunities for quality Physical Education and regular physical activity in and after school help students learn and practice health-promoting behaviors. Physical activity can improve school attendance and standardized test performance, and reduce disciplinary referrals, however, one half of California's school districts audited in 2005-09 failed to provide the required amount of physical education. School administrators and educators should:

- **Adopt requirements for students to be active** for at least 50% of Physical Education class time.
- **Enforce, do not further erode, existing Physical Education standards as required by the State Education Code.**
- **Prioritize staff development** and technical support for teachers, and an accountability system.
- **Make equitable investments** in physical activity infrastructure at schools.
- **Incorporate physical education** and activity into afterschool programs for all children.

HELP US REACH THE GOAL

Please declare your support for the basic right that everyone has to safe places for play and physical activity. On behalf of The Joint Use Statewide Taskforce (JUST), The Strategic Alliance for Healthy Food and Activity Environments, The Healthy Places Coalition, and all endorsers, we will present this declaration to local, state, and federal policymakers to demonstrate our shared vision for equal and accessible physical activity opportunities for all, and to garner their support for effective health and equity promoting policies and practices.

To sign-on today as an organizational or individual endorser, contact: Sandra Viera, Program Coordinator at Prevention Institute (Sandra@preventioninstitute.org).

A full list of citations is available on www.jointuse.org/safeplacestoplay