



## Framing Messages Regarding Active Living

**State and local decision-makers play an important role in supporting active living strategies where people live, learn, work, and play.** The information in this guide provides guidance to help state and local public health reframe messaging related to evidence-based approaches that will resonate with values of decision-makers. Recommendations are based on a qualitative analysis that included a literature review, key informant interviews, and focus groups conducted by the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors.

Define and reframe obesity as it relates to active living policy

**Focus on obesity-related chronic disease and societal impact.** Not only does obesity decrease quality of life, it also increases one's risk for multiple chronic diseases—specifically high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and certain

cancers. Both the literature review and key informants identified a significant “predictor” of decision-maker support for active living policies as the perception that chronic disease is a serious societal problem.

**Discuss appropriate expectations for reductions in obesity-related chronic disease and associated costs, including intermediate measures of success.** Key informants said that legislators and other decision-makers tend to want more substantial results regarding obesity reduction rates than states currently are reporting. Because it is unrealistic to assume that active living policies will result in significant reductions in obesity rates within one or two years, key informants recommended using intermediate outcome measures to help decision-makers develop realistic expectations of the impact of evidence-based policies on health outcome. For example, state and local sources of population level data, such as the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), can be used to describe the impact of active living strategies on healthy behaviors and other potential benefits.

**Explain that policy and environmental changes support individual healthy choices.** The literature indicates that related contextual features can dramatically influence a person’s actions, thus altering environments may be an effective driver of individual behavior change. Discuss how policies that assure walkability provide a safe choice for children to walk to school and for seniors to exercise.

Communicate the economic perspective  
to demonstrate value of active living policy

**Provide examples of how evidence-based active living policy approaches will positively affect the business economy.** Key informants noted that most active living policies are first introduced and implemented at the local level. Decision-makers are particularly interested in policies that have the potential to positively affect businesses in the communities they represent. Use local success stories to demonstrate potential outcomes for similar state-level policy.

Focus on local data and solutions,  
rather than national statistics or problems

**Use constituent support or stories.** The literature review identified constituent needs or opinions as one of the most influential factors for decision-makers when determining health policy priorities. Key informant interviewees also noted that when legislators and



other decision-makers are considering health policy, personal interest and strong constituent voices are influential. Therefore, identify constituents who are able to support effectively the evidence and discuss how policies that assure walkable communities have benefitted local residents and business. When including data, make sure the data are unbiased, timely, relevant, local whenever possible, and linked directly to constituents and community stakeholders.

**Provide tangible solutions broken down into actionable steps.**

The literature review as well as key informants and focus group participants all noted that focusing on the solution rather than the problem is particularly effective. Discuss how trails connecting neighborhoods to schools, retail, and community services can increase walking and biking in all age groups while also having a positive effect on retail businesses. In addition, ensure that a “just-in-time” solution” is available for policy action when the opportunity arises to promote walkability by laying the groundwork early through public and decision-maker education.

“At the local level, active living polices are viewed favorably as bringing in more jobs, more money to local business with walkable, bikeable areas.”

– State Health Department Leader

Discuss impact on specific populations of highest interest such as children, youth, and older adults

**Discuss impact on safety and health, especially for children, seniors, and individuals with disabilities.** Key informants recommended that messengers provide data and/or examples of outcomes such as brain development and kindergarten readiness of young children. Increased independence of seniors and individuals with disabilities also is important to legislators, as they tend to be supportive of policies that ensure the health and safety of vulnerable populations.

Actions to effectively frame active living policy messages to decision-makers

### I. Consider decision-makers' values that relate to active living

- Be aware that their values may include:
  - Support for the business community;
  - Support for children's brain development and kindergarten readiness;
  - Support for older adults' and individuals with disabilities' quality of life and their ability to live independently; and
  - Support for individual responsibility for health behaviors and health outcomes.

### II. Develop messages that reflect decision-makers' values

- Provide specific examples and share data of how obesity and associated chronic diseases are negatively affecting the business community and, conversely, how active living policies can decrease chronic disease rates.
- Share state-level data on obesity and associated chronic disease rates; describe the estimated cost to the state Medicaid program for treating those conditions; and provide examples of healthcare cost reductions to be achieved by lowering obesity-related chronic disease rates.
- Frame the message around chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease, for which obesity is a contributing risk factor, using state and local data and success stories.
- Provide examples of evidence-based active living policies in geographically and demographically similar states.
- Discuss the economic impact of being an activity friendly city, where kids can walk safely to school, crime is reduced with well-lit, well-marked paths, more people use existing trails, and families are more engaged.

# Assessing Decision-Maker Support for Chronic Disease Prevention

Effective Messages for Decision-Makers Related to Healthy Eating and Active Living

- Describe how active living policies help attract new businesses and young workers to communities and can help local retail businesses grow.
- Discuss how active living policies improve the health of children and youth. Use concrete examples to illustrate the decision-makers' role in strengthening active living for children and youth.
- Highlight solutions in plain language in oral and written communications (e.g. briefs, infographics, website, etc.), that are accompanied by clear actions that stakeholders can take to achieve them.
- Provide examples of the impact of state programs and funding sources that have had positive outcomes.



### III. Use effective messengers

- Strong constituent voices and community stakeholders
- Individuals and professional organizations representing the business and medical communities
- Grassroots advocates committed to increasing physical activity opportunities
- Local government entities that have authority to affect active living policy through local planning, land use, transportation, recreation infrastructure, and zoning
- Local boards of health, city councils, and county commissions to share their stories of successful active living policy initiatives and to lend support
- State affiliates of national organizations, such as the American Heart Association and American Cancer Society
- Representatives of local chambers of commerce to share examples from their respective communities
- Partners to cite examples of how partnerships between the State Health Department, planning committees, other state agencies (education, housing, transportation, etc.), large businesses, chambers of commerce, and other advisory or advocacy groups have promoted physical activity and active friendly communities
- Schools and businesses to demonstrate their support for active living policies.
- The governor and current administration as champions.

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