

H O U S T O N ACTIVE LIVING PLAN

UPDATED 2021



H O U S T O N

ACTIVE LIVING PLAN

— UPDATED 2021 —



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Process	7
3.	Action Plan	8
	Faith-Based	15
	Military/Veterans	21
	Business/Industry	27
	Education	33
	Health Care	39
	Media	45
	Public Health	51
	Culture	57
	Transportation	63
	Built Environment	71
	Parks & Recreation	79
	Sports & Fitness	85
4.	Appendices	91



INTRODUCTION

Go Healthy Houston and its partners are proud to share the updated Houston Active Living Plan. The Houston Active Living Plan, originally published in 2017, was updated and enhanced in 2021 to incorporate additional key societal sectors that play a significant role in the lives of Houstonians.

This update also better aligns the Houston Active Living Plan with the National Physical Activity Plan (www.physicalactivityplan.org) while maintaining its Houston perspective. The National Physical Activity Plan was developed by a coalition of organizations that came together to form the National Physical Activity Plan Alliance. The National Physical Activity Plan has served as a model for governments nation-wide, and incorporating elements of it into the Active Living Plan update brings Houston into line with peer cities.

The Go Healthy Houston (GHH) Task Force was established in 2012, via an Executive Order, to focus on obesity prevention. GHH aims to improve the health of all Houstonians by increasing access to healthy foods, physical activity, and tobacco-free places. GHH serves as an organized way for the City of Houston to solicit community feedback and involvement in policies and programs that improve the health of the community.

In 2016, GHH undertook a year-long process focused on physical activity and active living through the initiation of a planning process to look at ways Houstonians could better integrate active living into their everyday lives. This effort collected input and feedback from representatives from thirty-two organizations, included two community workshops, and culminated in the first ever Houston Active Living Plan (www.gohealthyhouston.org/active-living-plan) released in 2017.

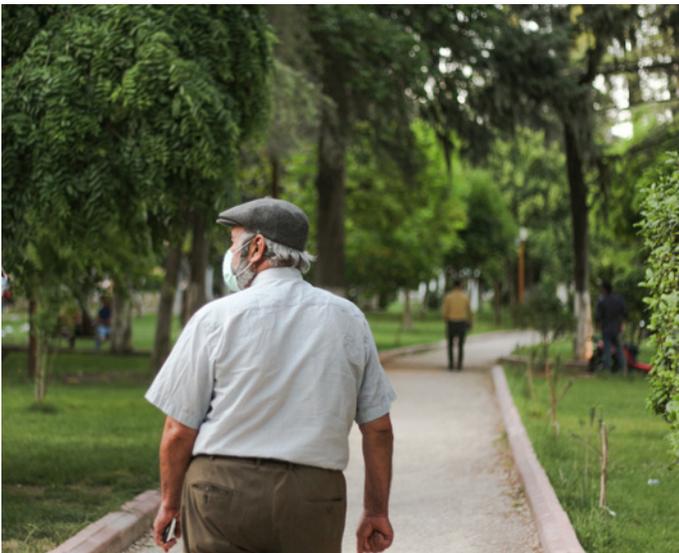
As described in the original publication in 2017, the Houston Active Living Plan is meant to be a “living document” to be built upon as conditions change and other opportunities arise. To that end, the Houston Health Department initiated this update of the Houston Active Living Plan in the summer of 2021. These updates expanded the Plan’s scope to incorporate six additional sectors, which are included in the national plan, along with its original six sectors.



> Cyclists enjoy trails along the bayous.



> Teachers lead a yoga class for children.



> Walking is good exercise, no matter what age.



> B-cycle rentals have expanded across Houston.



> Go Healthy Houston leads a public exercise class.



> Houstonians enjoy a public exercise class in a City park.



> Cyclists make use of bike lanes in downtown Houston.



> Joggers in Memorial Park.

Active living is about people working together to create places where physical activities such as walking, biking, and playing are integral parts of everyday life. It is critical to our physical and mental wellbeing. Active living is not solely defined as fitness exercise during leisure time such as going to the gym. It also includes activity integrated into our daily routines such as walking to the store or bus stop or taking the stairs.

Active living is critical to our physical and mental wellbeing. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), physical benefits include weight control and a reduction of risks for cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis and some cancers. Regular physical activity may also improve mental health and mood and increase the chances of having a longer life. In addition, sedentary behavior is linked with a significant increase in the risk of type 2 diabetes as well as obesity.¹

The benefits of physical activity and active living are especially important in Houston where residents suffer from high rates of chronic health conditions. It is estimated that 32% of Houston adults are challenged with obesity, 29% have high blood pressure, and 13% have diabetes.² However, policies affecting the built environment and the way we live, have made it harder to be physically active on a regular basis. According to the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, children need at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day, and adults need 150 minutes per week. The CDC estimates nationally that only 20% of adults are meeting these requirements and even fewer children.

The COVID-19 pandemic further challenged the ability of many to meet these physical activity recommendations. It is vital that we look for new ways to increase and maintain physical activity, and to partner with sectors of society that touch our everyday lives.

Many people reduced their physical activity by staying at home and avoiding contact with others. The cancellation of organized mass activities, both outdoors and indoors, went on for months in the early part of quarantine/shutdown to prevent spread of the virus. The pandemic limited opportunities for people to engage in physical activity in many ways.

However, people have sought out new and different ways to address their needs. On an individual basis, it appears that outdoor activities may have increased. People are bicycling more, as measured by the expansion and busy operations of the B-Cycle bike rental business. Also, with the Houston Parks Board, Buffalo Bayou Partnership, Harris County Precinct 1, and other community entities, there continues to be expansive growth in the trails and bike-ways throughout Houston, encouraging all forms of physical mobility. During this time, Houston has also seen the opening of several new outdoor institu-

tions: Eastern Glades and the redesign of portions of Memorial Park and the Houston Botanic Garden, to name a few. These areas encourage and provide opportunities for Houstonians to engage in active living on a daily basis.

Nonetheless, the effects of the pandemic have not been felt evenly. While some have been able to take advantage of the expansion of outdoor amenities or utilize the flexibility of remote work to engage in more physical activity, not all have been able to. For many, the pandemic has brought no kind of silver lining, only increased stresses. Health equity remains a significant challenge and has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

The Houston Active Living Plan is rooted in a “Health in All Policies” approach, which recognizes that policy decisions and environmental changes made within multiple sectors impact public health. “Health in All Policies” therefore requires collaboration and support from many City and County departments, along with an array of community partner organizations in health care, education, media, business, sports, land use/community design, and nonprofit sectors.

It is important to reaffirm the **Vision and Guiding Principles** cited in the previous plan:

VISION

Houston is a place where active living is easy. All residents live, work, play and age in safe, attractive and connected environments where physical activity is an integral part of their everyday lives.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Promote active living as a means to improve health and educate the community on how to practice an active lifestyle.
2. Explore policy, planning, environmental and cultural strategies to facilitate healthier choices.
3. Develop strategies to address the social determinants of health embracing the Health in All Policies approach.
4. Align public and private resources to develop strong partnerships, identify gaps in resources and maximize health impact.
5. Center strategies that celebrate Houston’s cultural diversity.

6. Engage community stakeholders, businesses, private institutions, governmental agencies and decision makers to maximize their role in improving public health.
7. Promote strategies that are based in evidence-based practice.
8. Advance health equity, so that everyone has the opportunity to reach their best health.

This update should be regarded as only the latest that the plan may undergo. As a living document, it is the hope and intent of Go Healthy Houston and the Houston Health Department, as funds and resources allow, to continue to engage with the Plan, to collect input from the community, and to develop new recommendations for how active living and healthy lifestyles can continue to be promoted across Houston. This update charts just one of many potential paths to further expanding the Active Living Plan. Future updates may consider other novel ways to collect input from stakeholders, develop partnerships and sponsorships to address strategies, and conduct research into the state of active living in the Houston region.



PROCESS

Go Healthy Houston and the Houston Health Department held a presentation after the original Active Living Plan was published and disseminated, and a “call for action” was issued to encourage community partners to adopt some of the strategies into their work. However, in early 2020, Houston, like the rest of the world, was plagued with the COVID-19 pandemic. While the planning and development process of the original Active Living Plan extended over a year long period, the timeframe for developing the updates to the Active Living Plan was compressed into a three-month period due to the Houston Health Department’s role as the lead agency for the urgent and priority demands of the COVID-19 response and education. With the advent of widespread COVID-19 vaccination in spring 2021, it appeared as if the pandemic was receding and life was returning to a “new” normal, allowing the Houston Health Department to again address the GHH vision and goals by initiating this update of Houston’s Active Living Plan.

Initially, the Health Department team planned to host in-person meetings with the Active Living Plan Subcommittee, focus group participants, and community partners and stakeholders. However, as the COVID-19 pandemic remained unpredictable, variants began to emerge, and policies and mandates were changing, it was decided that meetings and focus groups would be conducted virtually. All meetings with the Health Department team, the Active Living Plan subcommittee and the focus groups were held via virtual platforms.

Guided by the Active Living Plan subcommittee, led by members of the Go Healthy Houston (GHH) Task Force, the Houston Health Department conducted a series of focus groups with participants drawn from Houston’s Faith-based, Military/Veteran, Business/Industry, Education, Health Care, and Media sectors. In total 29 people participated in these focus groups. The focus groups asked participants to consider the role that active living plays in their personal lives and their communities, and how they could encourage and promote active living within their respective sectors. Based on the points discussed and suggested by focus group participants, the Active Living Plan subcommittee team compiled and analyzed inputs to develop steps for implementation, potential partnerships to promote active living across the sectors, and indicators that can be measured to determine successful implementation of the Plan recommendations. The results of this process informed the action plan in the following chapters.



ACTION PLAN

The action plan is broken into the following twelve sectors. Each sector has unique goals and strategies that have been developed based on a sector's particular strengths and needs:

1. **Faith-Based:** Promote information sharing and programming that encourage active living strategies for congregants across all faith-based institutions, socio-economic groups, abilities, and ages.
2. **Military/Veterans:** Improve overall awareness of active living opportunities and accessibility of facilities for the military/veteran population that will fulfill physical, mental, and social needs.
3. **Business/Industry:** Implement policies and programs that enable and encourage employees to adopt active living lifestyles to address their physical and mental health.
4. **Education:** Educational institutions should look for ways to promote and institutionalize physical activity among their students as well as their staff, including the importance of physical activity benefiting mental health stresses.
5. **Health Care:** Promote multi-sector partnerships with health care systems and professionals to increase physical activity of patients.
6. **Media:** Promote awareness of active living behaviors and their importance and benefits among the broader public.
7. **Public Health:** Promote widespread knowledge of the social determinants of health and the correlation between public health and decision making.
8. **Culture:** Offer active living initiatives that respond to Houston's diverse cultures.
9. **Transportation:** Promote the expansion of a multi-modal transportation network that offers safe and comfortable active transportation options with access to high-quality transit.
10. **Built Environment:** Design and build communities that are safe, convenient and attractive for people of all abilities to walk, bike and play.
11. **Parks & Recreation:** Improve the accessibility of the parks and recreation spaces so that they are integrated into Houstonians' everyday lives.
12. **Sports & Fitness:** Improve access to facilities and promote available resources that allow the community to engage in sports and fitness activities.

Across these themes, the Active Living Plan describes several strategies developed and agreed upon by stakeholders. The strategies aim to benefit the general public across all populations, regardless of age or ability. Each strategy identifies potential sectors to assist with implementation as well as potential outcome indicators and data sources the user can use to measure the strategies' success.

Partnerships for implementing strategies fall within many sectors including:

- **Employers and Private Business:** Business and industry should interact with all sectors to identify opportunities to promote physical activity within the workplace and throughout the community.
- **Public Offices and Government Leaders:** Public officers and government leaders should interact with all sectors to collectively make Houston a place where active living is easy.
- **Health Care:** Hospitals and societies of health care professionals should interact with all sectors to expand their efforts to support physical activity policies and programs at local, state, and federal levels.
- **Media:** Media organizations should employ the use of value-added strategies in support of active living campaigns. All sectors should use media campaigns in conjunction with policy and community-based activities promoting physical activity.
- **Academic Institutions:** Faculty, coaches and administrators should interact with all sectors to identify opportunities for increasing the physical activity levels of their students.
- **Non-Government Organizations/ Non-Profit Community Organizations:** Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and volunteer groups should interact with all sectors to limit barriers and increase physical activity in venerable populations.
- **Faith-Based:** Religious institutions want their congregants to be healthy in body, mind, and spirit. A cross-section of many sectors are represented in these religious institutions across all faiths and offer a great avenue for disseminating information and outreaching to target populations.

The target audience for the action plan includes policy and decision makers on all levels and across community sectors. Regardless of the sector, a role exists for everyone interested in implementing active living friendly changes towards a healthier and livable community. Solutions for better health outcomes are the responsibility of everyone in Houston.

FAITH-BASED

GOAL

Promote information-sharing and programming that encourage active living strategies for congregants across all faith-based institutions, socio-economic groups, abilities, and ages.

Strategy 1: Incorporate active living as part of holistic programming offered by faith institutions.

Strategy 2: Collaborate with local experts to share information and best practices with congregants.

Strategy 3: Share information with congregants through new and existing communications mediums and ministries.

MILITARY/ VETERANS

GOAL

Improve overall awareness of active living opportunities and accessibility of facilities for the military/veteran population that will fulfill physical, mental, and social needs.

Strategy 1: Work through employers, faith-based and educational institutions to promote awareness of active living opportunities and their benefits.

Strategy 2: Veteran service organizations should embrace active living as part of the holistic programming they offer.

Strategy 3: Improve access for veterans with physical disabilities by increasing transportation options and availability of adaptive/accessible exercise equipment.

Strategy 4: Seek ways to reach the veteran population through various communications options and sources of information dissemination.

BUSINESS/ INDUSTRY

GOAL

Implement policies and programs that enable and encourage employees to adopt active living lifestyles to address their physical and mental health.

Strategy 1: Allow greater flexibility in work hours so that employees can engage in physical activity and to access resources and services they need.

Strategy 2: Chambers of commerce should launch initiatives to educate businesses on the benefits of having healthy, physically active employees and to create opportunities for businesses, especially small businesses, to offer their employees ways to increase their physical activity and access needed resources.

Strategy 3: Businesses should promote, create, and implement opportunities for their employees to engage in physical activity both within and outside the workplace setting.

EDUCATION

GOAL

Educational institutions should look for ways to promote and institutionalize physical activity among their students as well as their staff, including the importance of physical activity benefiting mental health stresses.

Strategy 1: Schools should ensure that K-12 students participate daily in physical education programs and find alternatives and make suggestions for remote learning situations.

Strategy 2: Colleges, universities, and other post-secondary institutions should provide opportunities and incentives for students to engage in physical activity, and to support their mental health stresses as well.

Strategy 3: Educational institutions should encourage active living and physical activity, and their benefit on both physical and mental health, among their faculty and staff, not just their students.

HEALTH CARE

GOAL

Promote multi-sector partnerships with health care systems and professionals to increase physical activity of patients.

Strategy 1: Develop office infrastructure to assess patients for referrals to community physical activity services and opportunities.

Strategy 2: Inpatient treatment centers should provide appropriate opportunities for patients to be physically active and provide personalized prescriptions for physical activity when they depart.

Strategy 3: Education and training of health care providers should include providing specific instructions post assessment about patients' physical activity and its importance.

MEDIA

GOAL

Promote awareness of active living behaviors and their importance and benefits among the broader public.

Strategy 1: Develop longer-lived stories in media surrounding active living opportunities and their benefits.

Strategy 2: Launch partnership efforts between media organizations and active living advocates/experts to develop wider media campaigns.

Strategy 3: Leverage diverse media platforms to better reach and educate various age levels and diverse populations about low-impact, beneficial physical activities.

PUBLIC HEALTH

GOAL

To promote widespread knowledge of the social determinants of health and the correlation between public health and decision making.

Strategy 1: Educate the public, including youth, community leaders and public officials on the role of active living to transform public health issues.

Strategy 2: Ensure a “Health in All Policies” approach to decision making in Houston.

Strategy 3: Explore funding sources to build capacity and develop programs that will sustain active living efforts.

CULTURE

GOAL

To offer active living initiatives that respond to Houston’s diverse cultures.

Strategy 1: Promote the inclusion of culture and Houston’s cultural barriers in active living messaging.

Strategy 2: Encourage a shift in office culture that establishes comprehensive wellness policies supporting active living.

Strategy 2: Promote social norms and positive practices around cultural affinities that encourage active living.

TRANSPORTATION

GOAL

To promote the expansion of a multi-modal transportation network that offers safe, convenient and comfortable active transportation options with access to high-quality transit.

Strategy 1: Develop a cross media-marketing campaign promoting walking, biking and transit as safe, convenient and comfortable options for commuting to work, school and other trips.

Strategy 2: Continue to promote equity in the development of a high-capacity transit network and enhance the first and last mile connections to transit for walkers, rollers and cyclists.

Strategy 3: Assess walking conditions throughout the city and develop a pedestrian plan to improve barriers to walkability.

Strategy 4: Expand awareness of Travel Demand Management (TDM) initiatives with employers, education institutions and special purpose districts in Houston’s employment centers.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

GOAL

Design and build communities that are safe, convenient and attractive for people of all abilities to walk, bike and play.

Strategy 1: Promote mixed land uses and infill development to increase density and the potential for equitable transit-oriented development.

Strategy 2: Operationalize universal design and complete streets criteria into streetscape design standards for new development and roadway reconstruction.

Strategy 3: Promote Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) approach to improve neighborhood safety and security.

PARKS & RECREATION

GOAL

Improve the accessibility of the parks and recreation spaces so that they are integrated into Houstonians' everyday lives.

Strategy 1: Develop shared-use policies with schools and other public properties to increase neighborhood access to playgrounds and other recreation facilities across Houston.

Strategy 2: Develop a comprehensive communication plan to educate the community on the available services, amenities and resources available in parks and their benefits for active living.

Strategy 3: Coordinate and leverage resources across departments and agencies to improve pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access to parks.

SPORTS & FITNESS

GOAL

Improve access to facilities and promote available resources that allows the community to engage in sports and fitness activities to improve physical health.

Strategy 1: Promote sports and fitness through public facilities, schools, parks, worksites and non-traditional spaces.

Strategy 2: Launch broad partnership efforts to team with school districts, churches, parent groups, fitness professionals, athletic businesses (e.g. gyms), and adventure sports groups (e.g. skateboarding).

Strategy 3: Improve access to facilities and promote available resources that allow the community to engage in sports and fitness activities.



FAITH-BASED

GOAL

Promote information-sharing and programming that encourage active living strategies for congregants across all faith-based institutions, socio-economic groups, abilities, and ages.

LOCAL ASSESSMENT: FAITH-BASED

Faith-based institutions – churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, and their varied supporting organizations, such as faith-based social service agencies, charities, schools – play an important role in the lives of Houstonians of all backgrounds. According to a study by the Pew Research Center, 80% of Houstonians identify with a religious tradition.³ These institutions play a vital role in our city’s social fabric, nourishing the spiritual needs of congregants and providing guidance in their daily lives.

Because of the position that they occupy in the lives of their congregants and their broad reach and diversity throughout Houston communities, these faith-based institutions are well-positioned to play a role in promoting public health and active living. Key barriers that leaders have identified to active living are a lack of information, lack of access, and lack of available programs/activities. Faith-based institutions are perfectly positioned to address all of these obstacles.



1

STRATEGY I

Incorporate active living as part of holistic programming offered by faith institutions.

Faith-based institutions offer a wide range of programs designed to meet the spiritual and worldly needs of their congregants. Taking an expanded view to the well-being of congregants, this could also include developing programs and activities designed to encourage and facilitate active living. Such programming could take the form of creating sports leagues or leading classes in activities, such as aerobics or yoga, that are appropriate to the faith institution. Establishing such programs would provide opportunities and greatly encourage congregants to engage in physical activity and bolster spirituality with physical and mental health benefits.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Volunteer and non-profit
- Parks, recreation, fitness and sports

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Number of faith institutions offering physical activity programs
- Number of congregants participating in active living programs

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Surveys of faith leaders
- Survey of congregants



2

STRATEGY 2

Collaborate with local experts to share information and best practices with congregants.

Faith-based organizations are trusted sources of information for their congregants and parishioners. As part of looking after the well-being of their congregants, faith-based institutions can create opportunities to educate their congregations about active living by inviting in local experts to speak on the subject. Faith-based institutions can also publish information developed in tandem with experts in their regular communications with their congregants. Taking such an approach will help to elevate the importance of active living and best practices in the minds of parishioners.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Health care
- Volunteer and non-profit
- Public officials & government

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Number of requests for health care/ active living experts to speak to congregations
- Number of faith-based institutions that contact Houston Health and/or Parks Departments

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Surveys
- Meeting agendas
- Health Department
- Parks Department



3

STRATEGY 3

Share information with congregants through existing communications mediums and ministries.

Faith leaders and institutions occupy the bully pulpit for their congregations. When they speak, congregants listen. Faith-based institutions can leverage this influence to promote opportunities for active living activities among their congregants by sharing information through the tools that they use to communicate on a regular basis. This can take the form of their sermons and messages, public newsletters and bulletins, or through communications apps and other technology for institutions that have developed such instruments. Faith-based institutions can work with the City Health Department and other health care institutions to identify opportunities for appropriate active living activities that can be shared with congregants.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Health care
- Volunteer and non-profit
- Public officials & government

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Requests to City Health Department for active living information

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Public bulletins and announcements
- App utilization statistics





MILITARY/ VETERANS

GOAL

Improve overall awareness of active living opportunities and accessibility of facilities for the military/veteran population that will fulfill physical, mental, and social needs.

LOCAL ASSESSMENT: **MILITARY/VETERANS**

Although not known for being a military town and with no military bases, Houston has a substantial veteran population. Over 260,000 veterans call the metro Houston area home, nearly a fifth of all of Texas' veterans, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2019 American Community Survey.



A healthy, active lifestyle is no less important to veterans as it is for civilians, and many veterans face similar barriers and difficulties in living actively. Some veterans, particularly those with injuries and disabilities as a result of their service, also face unique challenges in approaching an active living lifestyle.

While veterans have a common shared experience in military service, they are a highly diverse population that cut across many common socio-economic identifiers, cultures, faiths, and ethnic groups. They do not fit neatly into a singular profile nor do they all have the same needs. What they do have in common, however, is their experience of military service and their shared status as part of an affinity group. Therefore, promoting active living among veterans must focus on broad commonalities and acute needs.



1

STRATEGY I

Work through employers, faith-based and educational institutions to promote awareness of active living opportunities and their benefits.

Both employers and higher education institutions have a wealth of information on their employees and students, including a person’s veteran status. Many of these entities have dedicated resource and service groups with a specific focus on veterans. These existing groups organized under employers and educational institutions can be a powerful resource in disseminating information on active living and lifestyle opportunities. Leading institutions such as health care entities and government agencies can collaborate to spread information and promote awareness of active living.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Business & Industry
- Education
- Public officials & government
- Volunteer & non-profit

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Number of entities that contact Houston Health and/or Parks Departments for information on Active Living

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Surveys
- Health Department
- Parks Department



2

STRATEGY 2

Veteran service organizations should embrace active living as part of the holistic programming they offer.

A number of organizations exist around the veteran community to serve their needs, especially in the transition from active-duty military service back to civilian life. These veteran service organizations (VSOs) are an important part of the community ecosystem that surrounds veterans, and the resources they provide run the gamut from assistance navigating VA benefits to career services to mental wellness and more. As supportive institutions that many veterans turn to, VSOs have great potential to both encourage and provide opportunities for veterans to take part in active living lifestyles. Some VSOs have already embraced this by offering gym amenities and classes such as cross fit and yoga.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Volunteer and non-profit
- Parks, recreation, fitness and sports
- Community organizations

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Number of VSOs engaged in active living programming
- Veterans reached

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Social Media
- Annual reports
- Surveys



3

STRATEGY 3

Improve access for veterans with physical disabilities by increasing transportation options and availability of adaptive/accessible exercise equipment.

Accessibility is a substantial barrier for those with physical disabilities, and this is no less true for veterans who have physical disabilities as a result of their military service. Providing access to transportation options and adaptive/accessible exercise equipment can go a long way to breaking down the very real barriers that exist to persons with physical disabilities living more active lifestyles. Gym facilities as well as the City Parks Department should increase the amount of adaptive/accessible exercise equipment that is available, which will provide more opportunities for veterans with physical disabilities to be active. Local government can also encourage the proliferation of such equipment by designing incentive programs.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Business and industry
- Parks, recreation, fitness and sports
- Public officials & government
- Volunteer and non-profit

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Purchases of new adaptive and accessible equipment
- New gym memberships

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Utilization reports
- Surveys
- Reports by gyms and other exercise facilities



4

STRATEGY 4

Seek ways to reach the veteran population through various communications options and sources of information dissemination.

Although Houston is not considered a military town, almost 20% of all military veterans in Texas reside in the greater Houston area. Members of the veteran focus group felt that there does not exist an adequate avenue of communications for veterans and veteran families. Word of mouth is usually the source for transmitting information but not all veterans and their families are involved with veteran groups to receive information in this way. Using the places in which veterans live, work and play, such as employers, educational institutions, faith-based institutions and social media can add to their sources of information.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Public officials & government
- Volunteer and non-profit
- Health care

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Number of veteran service organizations partnering with health experts
- Communications promoting active living from institutions

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Utilization reports
- Surveys
- Newsletters





BUSINESS & INDUSTRY

GOAL

Implement policies and programs that enable and encourage employees to adopt active living lifestyles to address their physical and mental health.

LOCAL ASSESSMENT: BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

Currently trends in technology are leading to more and more work being conducted at desks and in front of computers, with fewer workers active and on their feet. With increasing use of automation and artificial intelligence, these trends are bound to only accelerate further in the future. There are real consequences to having a more sedentary workforce, chief among which is the increased likelihood of health problems.

Healthy employees are an asset to businesses, they are more productive and effective, they are less likely to be absent from work, and have lower costs of health care. Meanwhile unhealthy employees can lead to significant impacts on businesses, the costs of health care are borne through health insurance and other employee supports, and businesses suffer for reduced worker productivity and increased absenteeism. Business and industry have a vested interest in the health and well-being of their workers.

There are numerous steps that businesses can take to encourage and incentivize their employees to be more physically active both on and off the job. Simple policy changes, offers of incentives and discounts, and other amenities can go a long way in improving employees' levels of physical activity. Businesses are in a unique position given their proximity in the lives of employees, and they stand to greatly benefit from improved employee health and well-being.

It should also be noted that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has had significant effects on the workplace and work routine of many businesses. In some cases, the changes may have made it easier or more conducive for employees to incorporate physical activity into their daily lives. However, these effects have not been distributed equally, and while some employees benefit from the greater flexibility offered by working remotely, others experience a workday largely similar to that before the pandemic.



1

STRATEGY I

Allow greater flexibility in work hours so that employees can engage in physical activity and to access resources and services they need.

Employers should adopt and allow employees to engage in more flexible work schedules outside of the typical work hours of 9:00 am – 5:00 pm. Providing employees with more flexibility in their schedules can enable them to engage in physical activity at times that are better suited for them, such as exercising earlier in the day, avoiding peak hours at facilities, or even engaging in physical activity mid-day. Adopting such policies should also be accompanied by providing information to employees on the benefits of active living. Employers should collaborate with health experts such as the Houston Health Department to design and provide information that is both evidence-based and relevant to employees.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Business & industry
- Health care
- Public officials & government
- Academic institutions

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Number of employers adopting flexible work hours
- Number of employees engaging in physical activity
- Partnerships between businesses and health experts

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Business and employee surveys
- Houston Health Department
- Greater Houston Partnership and other Chambers of Commerce



2

STRATEGY 2

Chambers of commerce should launch initiatives to educate businesses on the benefits of having healthy, physically active employees and to create opportunities for businesses, especially small businesses, to offer their employees ways to increase their physical activity and access needed resources.

There is a compelling business case to be made for the benefits of having a workforce of physically active employees. Physically active employees are healthier and suffer from fewer chronic health conditions, they are more productive, and have fewer absences from work. Furthermore, their costs of health care are also lower, which are passed on to employers through programs such as health insurance and health savings accounts. Chambers of commerce, as entities that bring together large numbers of businesses, are ideally situated to help to educate their membership about the benefits of having a healthier workforce and to make the business case for promoting active living. They are also positioned to convene groups of businesses, especially small businesses, who alone may not have the ability or capacity to develop and utilize benefits for their employees but combined are larger and stronger, in obtaining amenities for their staff. To pursue these initiatives, they should partner with health experts, who can assist in developing specific approaches to promote physical activity and provide research-backed information on its multitude of benefits.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Business and industry
- Health care
- Public officials & government
- Academic institutions

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Active Living promotional materials developed by Chambers of Commerce and partners
- Number of businesses with active living programs and amenities for staff

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Business surveys
- Employee surveys
- Meeting sign-ins
- Reports from participating companies



3

STRATEGY 3

Businesses should promote, create, and implement opportunities for their employees to engage in physical activity both within and outside the workplace setting.

Companies should create or enhance access to places for employees to engage in physical activity before, during, and after work. These efforts should be combined with outreach to educate employees about the importance and the benefits of physical activity. Employers can create opportunities for employees to engage in light physical activity by promoting the use of building space for walking during breaks and taking the stairs instead of elevators. Parking lots can be used to set up for physical activity during breaks as well. Businesses can also partner with gyms and similar facilities to offer employees discounts and vouchers that can be used for different activities such as yoga, Pilates, and workout classes. Businesses can also partner with public entities such as the Houston Parks Department to promote awareness of amenities, facilities, and exercise equipment that may be free to use.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Business and industry
- Public officials & government

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Numbers of new gym memberships
- Number of businesses offering active living programming
- Number of formal business partnerships
- Number of businesses offering fitness program incentives

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Surveys
- Reports from participating businesses





EDUCATION

GOAL

Educational institutions should look for ways to promote and institutionalize physical activity among their students as well as their staff, including the importance of physical activity benefiting mental health stresses.

LOCAL ASSESSMENT: EDUCATION

The Houston area is served by 25 Independent School Districts and numerous private and charter schools, and boasts over 40 colleges, universities, and other post-secondary institutions. School and education are a central focus in the daily lives of children and youth, and occupy a position of major importance to their parents as well. Because of their importance in the lives of so many Houstonians, educational institutions have a great potential to increase awareness of active living.

Physical activity is an important component of education for younger students but takes on a diminishing role as students age and matriculate. This is especially true for post-secondary and higher education, where physical activity often disappears entirely.

There is substantial research linking physical activity with improvements to academic performance. However, because of a pressure on academic achievement as well as the threat of budget cuts, school-based physical activity programs are often deprioritized. This is made all the more difficult by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has stretched school budgets even further and brought unique challenges of remote learning.

All education personnel, not just coaches but also teachers, administrators, and district officials, should take on a leadership role in increasing the levels of physical activity of their students. Such an approach is bound to benefit students not just physically, but also academically and emotionally.



1

STRATEGY I

Schools should ensure that K-12 students participate daily in physical education programs and find alternatives and make suggestions for remote learning situations.

Schools can play a central role in ensuring that students engage in physical activity on a daily basis by providing quality physical education programs. Regular physical education can have substantial benefits for students' mental health and their academic performance, and it should be given the same priority as academic instruction. Schools should incorporate physical activity in every school day, which may require rethinking the run of the school day. Light physical activity can also be incorporated into lessons in the classroom and during break periods. Physical activity should remain a priority throughout K-12 grades and youth in middle and high school should continue to engage in physical activity programs on a daily basis.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

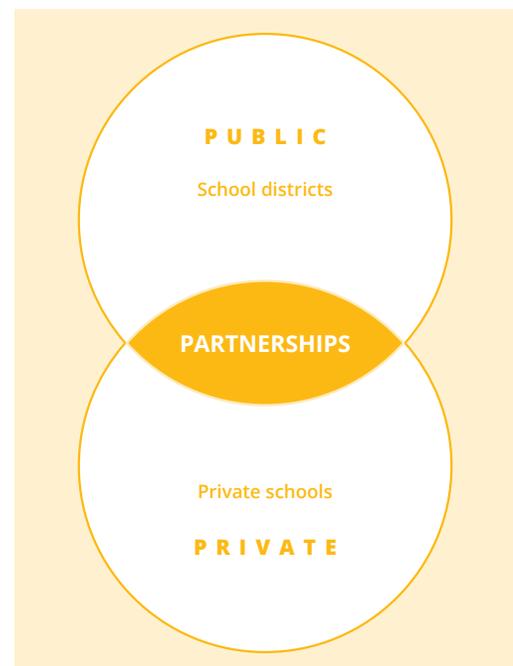
- Education

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Number of school districts adopting comprehensive physical education programs
- Number of schools that implement physical activity in lessons

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- School syllabi
- School schedules



2

STRATEGY 2

Colleges, universities, and other post-secondary institutions should provide opportunities and incentives for students to engage in physical activity, and to support their mental health stresses as well.

By the time that many students have reached post-secondary education, physical education is a non-factor. At the same time, many post-secondary institutions have facilities like well-equipped gyms on their campuses that are available to students at little or no charge. Higher education institutions should promote students engaging in physical activity by establishing requirements for physical education courses that contribute to graduation. Institutions can also promote physical activity by providing value-added opportunities such as offering staff trainers at their facilities or providing activity classes such as yoga. Finally, higher educational institutions should adopt student physical activity levels as an important performance indicator of success and include campus physical activity as part of their overall strategic plans.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

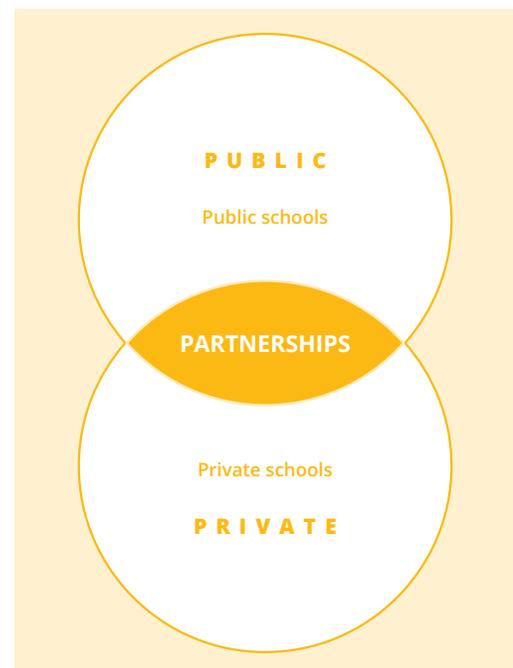
- Education

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Number of students utilizing exercise facilities
- Number of post-secondary institutions implementing physical education credit requirements
- Physical activity incorporated as part of strategic plans

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Usage reports from facilities
- Student surveys
- Institution strategic plans



3

STRATEGY 3

Educational institutions should encourage active living and physical activity, and their benefit on both physical and mental health, among their faculty and staff, not just their students.

Educational institutions are not just their students, they employ large numbers of trained and professional staff to educate and care for students as well. Just like businesses, there is an important case to be made that physically active staff are healthier and more productive, providing better instruction for their pupils and costing less for institutions that are often budget-conscious. Educational institutions should look to promote physical activity among their employees, they can also utilize facilities designed for students by offering physical activity programming for staff as well. As with businesses, educational institutions can also coordinate with their human resource departments in designing programs to incentivize physical activity among employees.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

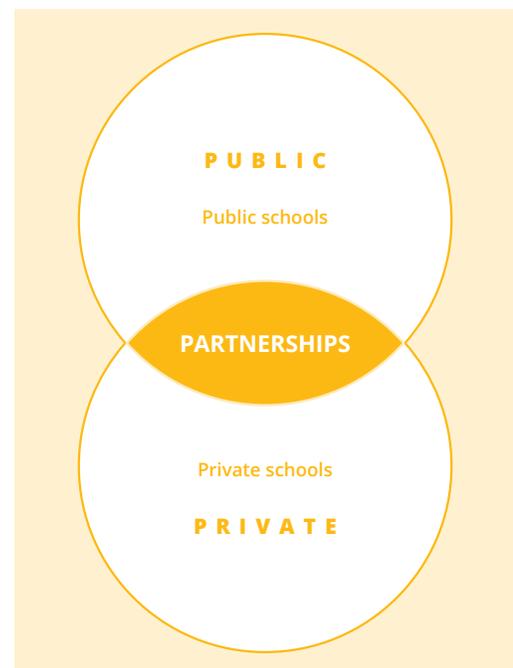
- Education

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Number of staff utilizing facilities
- Number of schools implementing physical activity programs for staff
- Number of schools offer fitness program incentives

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Employee surveys
- District reports



LOCAL ASSESSMENT: HEALTH CARE

The health care sector encompasses a wide range of entities and individuals, ranging from individual practices to large research institutions to skilled nurses to health educators. With over 85 hospitals in the region as well as the Texas Medical Center, the largest medical center in the world, Houston has no shortage of medical professionals and experts who care for residents' varied needs.



In many cases, the most important and regular interactions that Houstonians will have with the health care sector are with their personal physicians and their offices. These physicians and their staff occupy a position of importance in the health and activity decisions made by their patients, they are trusted to provide information and advice for their patients to maintain and improve their health.

The health benefits of active living are well-documented, ranging from weight control to reducing the risk of numerous diseases and chronic conditions. With this in mind, active living should form an important part of the approach to any patient's well-being, either as a preventative measure or for its ameliorative properties. As health care moves to adopt a more holistic view of patients' well-being, active living and physical activity should form important components in the approach to patient health.



1

STRATEGY I

Develop office infrastructure to assess patients for referrals to community physical activity services and opportunities.

Physical activity can be an important leading indicator of a patient’s health, and can also be an important aspect of treating certain diseases and chronic conditions. Primary care providers should consider ways to evaluate their patients’ levels of physical activity. For patients with low levels of physical activity, providers should partner with local community services to provide recommendations of physical activity programs and opportunities that a patient can engage in. In this way, health care providers can take an elevated approach to patient physical activity that is similar to making a prescription or a referral to a specialist.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Health care
- Volunteer and non-profit
- Parks, recreation, fitness and sports
- Community organizations

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Formal partnerships between health care providers and community organizations
- Number of new memberships in physical activity programs
- Number of patients referred to physical activity programs

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Surveys of health care providers
- Patient feedback surveys
- Electronic medical records



2

STRATEGY 2

Inpatient treatment centers should provide appropriate opportunities for patients to be physically active and provide personalized prescriptions for physical activity when they depart.

Inpatient treatment facilities may keep certain patients in a state of rest as they convalesce, but this may not be necessary for all patients. Inpatient facilities should look to develop programs that provide opportunities for patients to engage in light to moderate physical activity as appropriate to their conditions. Such programs will help patients to keep up regular physical activity and reinforce its importance to their overall health. Furthermore, treatment facilities should develop and provide recommendations of appropriate levels of physical activity for patients when they leave a facility to continue their recovery at home. Such recommendations should be viewed as a 'prescription' for patient's overall wellness and constitute an important aspect of their recovery process.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

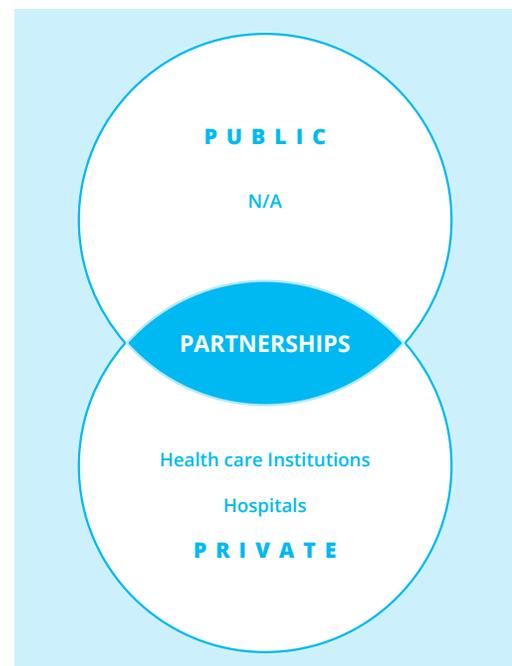
- Health care

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Number of inpatient care facilities implementing patient physical activity programs
- Patient after care directives incorporating physical activity

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Surveys of health care institutions
- Patient feedback surveys



3

STRATEGY 3

Education and training of health care providers should include providing specific instructions post assessment about patients' physical activity and its importance.

The positive health benefits of physical activity are numerous and well-documented, and, as such, patient physical activity should be emphasized as an important aspect of any educational program for health care professionals. These educational programs should incorporate evidence-based approaches to supporting physical activity as part of their curriculum. Similarly, continuing education and professional development programs should likewise include education on the importance of physical activity. Government agencies and licensing boards can support this approach by adding content on physical activity to licensing and certification exams.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

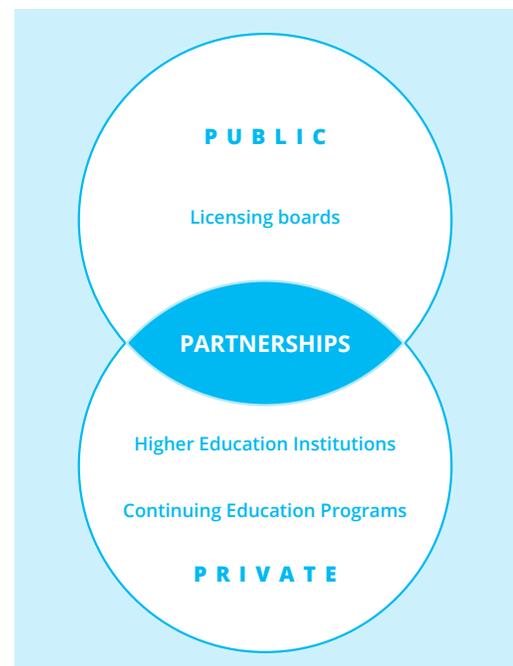
- Health care
- Academic institutions
- Public officials & government

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Number of health care education programs incorporating physical activity
- Number of continuing education programs highlighting physical activity
- Updates to licensing exams

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Course curriculum and syllabi
- Licensing exam content





MEDIA

GOAL

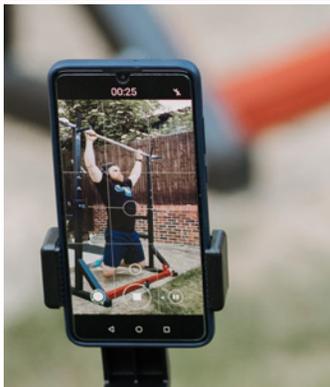
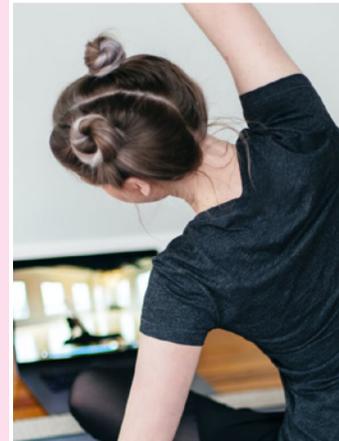
Promote awareness of active living behaviors and their importance and benefits among the broader public.

LOCAL ASSESSMENT: MEDIA

There are six major television stations and one major citywide paper in Houston, as well as numerous smaller TV and radio stations and publications that serve the city's large and diverse audiences. These media outlets provide information, keeping Houstonians informed and up-to-date on local news. They are trusted sources of information.

Houstonians are also engaged with new, online media and digital tools, such as Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram. They go to these platforms to learn about the latest trends, to follow influencers and creators. The social media revolution and smart device proliferation keep Houstonians plugged into the latest news and trends on a nearly constant basis.

Media, both new and traditional, has an important role to play in active living for its ability to inform, instruct, and influence people. Houstonians turn to media to learn, and it can provide information on the importance and benefits of active living. People engage with what they see and learn from media, and media outlets can instruct Houstonians on how they can go about living actively and implement it into their daily lives. Media outlets have influence, they set the agenda in what they choose to highlight and to cover, and they can encourage more people to integrate active living into their lives by featuring content related to active living.



Media organizations should employ the use of value-added strategies in support of active living campaigns of other sectors. All sectors in turn should always use media campaigns in conjunction with policy and community-based activities promoting physical activity.



1

STRATEGY I

Develop longer-lived stories in media surrounding active living opportunities and their benefits.

Media platforms are active, living environments across which stories unfold and play out. In order to promote broader awareness of active living opportunities, it is important to take the view that any stories on active living should not be ‘one and done.’ Instead, such stories should ‘live’ for multiple days, unfolding over multiple broadcasts, columns, or posts. Active living advocates should consider follow-up outreach after initial press releases to reinforce messages and discuss how people can participate. In the same vein, media outlets should consider the broader picture of a story about active living, which can involve multiple sectors such as public safety and infrastructure angles. In this way, stories about active living can remain in circulation for longer periods of time, and thus have more time to penetrate into the public consciousness.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Media
- Health care
- Public officials & government
- Community organizations

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Number of active living stories in traditional media outlets
- Ad-equivalent value of active living stories
- Viewership and readership of active living stories

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Viewership and publicity reports
- Readership reports
- Advertising rates of local outlets



2

STRATEGY 2

Launch partnership efforts between media organizations and active living advocates/experts to develop wider media campaigns.

In traditional media, TV, radio, and print, the decision-making role of executives and editors is especially important in determining what material is featured and highlighted. Active living proponents should make the case to such decision-makers about the importance of active living content. Media outlets can promote active living by featuring more stories with an active living component, or by offering advertising discounts or public service announcements to groups that are aligned with active living goals.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Media
- Health care
- Public officials & government
- Community organizations

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Number of active living stories in traditional media outlets
- Ad-equivalent value of active living stories
- Viewership and readership of active living stories
- Ads and PSAs focused on active living

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Viewership and publicity reports
- Readership reports
- Advertising rates of local outlets



3

STRATEGY 3

Leverage diverse media platforms to better reach and educate various age levels and diverse populations about low-impact, beneficial physical activities.

Physical activity and active living can take numerous forms, not all of which demand a regimented routine, going to a gym, or even going outside. Perception in the public mind, however, can differ substantially from this reality, as many may conceive of active living as demanding, time-consuming or coming with a cost. Thus providing information on physical activities that can be easily performed in one’s home or apartment can reduce perceived barriers to active living. New and digital media platforms can be especially helpful by allowing information and real-world demonstrations to be distributed and accessed quickly and easily.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Media
- Health care
- Public officials & government
- Community organizations

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Social media trends
- Posts by media influencers
- Percentage increase of people exercising at home

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Use of active living hashtags
- Video viewership metrics
- Surveys



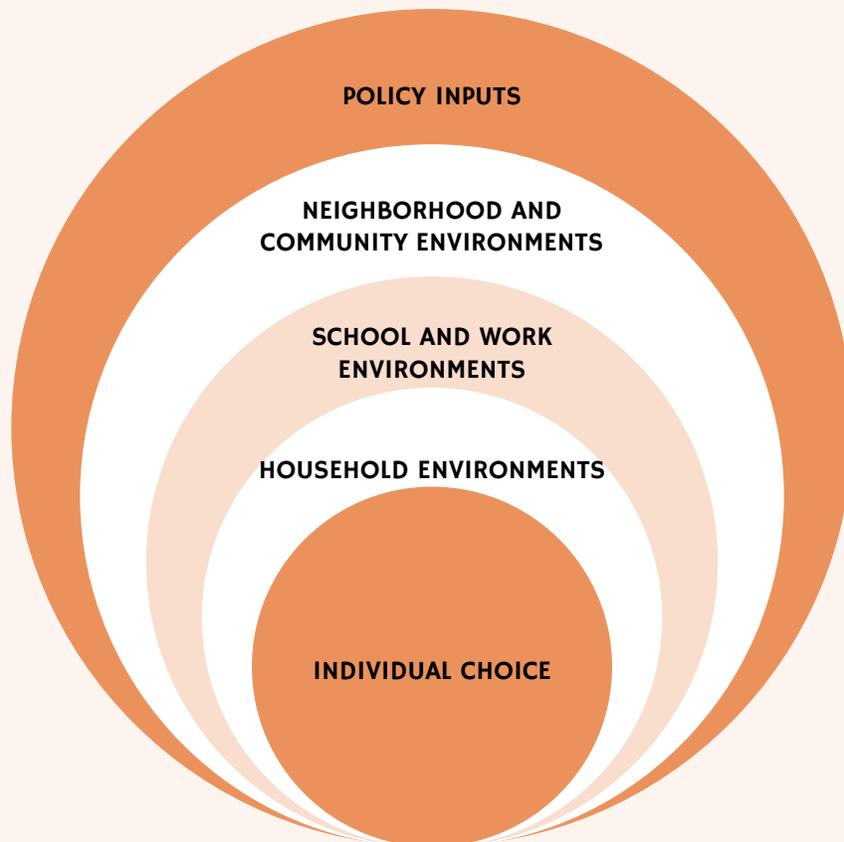
LOCAL ASSESSMENT: PUBLIC HEALTH

“Public health refers to all organized measures (whether public or private) to prevent disease, promote health, and prolong life among the population as a whole. Its activities aim to provide conditions in which people can be healthy and focus on entire populations, not on individual patients or diseases. Thus, public health is concerned with the total system and not only the eradication of a particular disease.”

- World Health Organization

City leaders and public health professionals understand the relationship between public health and our culture, built environment, transportation system and amenities.

In recent years, public health professionals have turned to social-ecological models to understand the interrelationship between personal and environmental factors and between physical and social environments.



1

STRATEGY I

Educate the public, including youth, community leaders and public officials on the role of active living to transform public health issues.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Business and industry
- Health Care
- Education
- Media
- Volunteer and non-profit
- Parks, recreation, fitness and sports
- Transportation, land-use and community design
- Public officials & government

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Number of “Sticky Solutions Workshops” held in the community
- Number of open forums/meeting where a public health advocate spoke
- Number of written articles, bylines, op-eds
- Number of media outlets publishing public health and community health transformation
- Public Health representation in non-public health meetings, discussions or events.
- Number of youth mentorship/ internships opportunities developed in public health

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Outreach to officials by community groups
- FQHCs
- Community Health Commons
- Houston Area Survey (SHEA)
- Health of Houston
- Greater Houston Health Connect
- HCAD, tax assessor
- FitnessGram
- YRBS
- BRFSS



2

STRATEGY 2

Ensure a “Health in All Policies” approach to decision making in Houston.

The City of Houston and all public and private entities in Houston should review their existing policies for its impact on health and make recommendations as needed.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Business and industry
- Health Care
- Education
- Media
- Volunteer and non-profit
- Parks, recreation, fitness and sports
- Transportation, land-use and community design
- Public officials & government

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Health impact assessments for all policies
- Decision making tool

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- City of Houston policy documents



3

STRATEGY 3

Explore funding sources for capacity building and developing programs that will sustain active living efforts.

Many existing and potential new funding sources may support the strategies identified in this plan. Houston organizations should identify these opportunities and partner with organizations to pursue available funding sources that are otherwise not being fully utilized.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Employers & Businesses
- Public officials & government
- Community organizations

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

Funds identified and raised from:

- Management districts' safety and beautification programs
- Foundation grants
- Land Assemblage Redevelopment Authority (LARA) lots sales tax
- Community benefit/Affordable Care Act
- Health and life insurers
- ARTS funding - hospitality tax

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Management districts
- Foundations
- County Commissioners
- LARA



LOCAL ASSESSMENT: CULTURE

Culture is a group of people's way of life: its behaviors, beliefs and values that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that generations share through communication and imitation. Culture influences people's social norms and behavior: how they spend their time, what they eat and how they spend their money. Active living can become widely adopted in Houston by becoming part of its culture.



Office culture may hinder active living in several ways. Many of Houston's professional workers who spend 1/3 of their day at work are sedentary throughout the day. While business attire is conducive for the air conditioned environments, it adds one more barrier to being active.

Food is a big part of Houston's culture. Several national publications recently praised some of the city's finer

dining experiences, shaping its reputation as a growing "foodie town." As people gravitate towards the more convenient options in a market environment that appeals to our taste buds over our health, it can lead to a cultural concern regarding our relationship with food. Encouraging healthy eating in the workplace, schools, events and restaurants may help change people's eating habits.

Dogs — our lovable, walkable pets — are helping shape active lifestyles. In the Active Living Visioning Workshop, stakeholders frequently cited their "dogs walk them everyday."

This cultural affinity towards dogs is evident in the market for downtown residential developments: for every 100 apartments units, an expected 30 dogs will join the neighborhood.⁴ As a result, dog parks are being constructed, providing an attractive amenity for dog-owning residents who will have an enjoyable, social place to walk their dogs.



1

STRATEGY I

Promote the inclusion of culture and Houston cultural barriers in active living messaging.

Among the physically inactive, those within health disparate populations may benefit from targeted messaging and interventions to impact behavior change. Because non-profit organizations and volunteer groups often have the capacity and willingness to work with targeted populations, they can help ensure that physically inactive people within their organizational scope are reached.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Public officials & government
- Media
- Community organizations

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Number of non-profit/volunteer organizations engaged in active living messaging to target communities
- Individuals reached and demographics
- Geographic distribution across all council districts
- Culturally sensitive markers for active living campaign
- Tested messaging with focus groups

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Social media
- Annual reports
- Surveys



2

STRATEGY 2

Encourage a shift in office culture that establishes comprehensive wellness policies supporting active living.

Employers should be encouraged to provide “end of trip facilities” for workers who commute via walking, cycling or riding transit, such as showers, changing rooms, and bicycle parking. Alternatively, discounts could be offered to nearby gyms. Employers should offer bike buddies or transit ambassadors to educate employees in alternative means of transportation to work. This could also serve as a team building initiative. HGAC should be consulted to educate employers and employees on federal incentives for commuting via alternative transportation. Incentives may include b-cycle memberships. Workplace policies such as casual dress codes and flexible schedules to allow time for mid-day workouts or minimized travel time should also be considered.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Employers & Businesses
- Public officials & government
- Health care
- Academic institutions
- Community organizations

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Number of bike friendly businesses
- Number of employers establishing comprehensive wellness policies and physical activity incentives (large, medium, small businesses)
- Number of end of trip facilities available at worksites (bike racks, work lockers, work showers)
- Number of employers adopting relaxed corporate attire

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Businesses
- American Community Survey
- HGAC
- B-cycle
- METRO



3

STRATEGY 3

Promote social norms and positive practices around cultural affinities that encourage active living.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Employers & Businesses
- Public officials & government
- Health Care
- Academic institutions
- Community organizations

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Number of dog owners walking their dog
- Number of dog parks
- Number of bikes on light rail
- Number of worksites that incentivize biking or taking transit to work and disincentives parking/driving

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- BARC
- Super Neighborhoods
- Metro



The background features a repeating pattern of light blue icons on a darker blue background. The icons include a kayak, a bus, tennis rackets, a dog, a person in a canoe, a baseball bat and ball, bowling pins and a ball, a person performing a martial arts move, a person on a bicycle, a person walking, a person on a bicycle with a trailer, a skateboard, a person running, a person on a bench, a person swimming, and a basketball hoop.

TRANSPORTATION

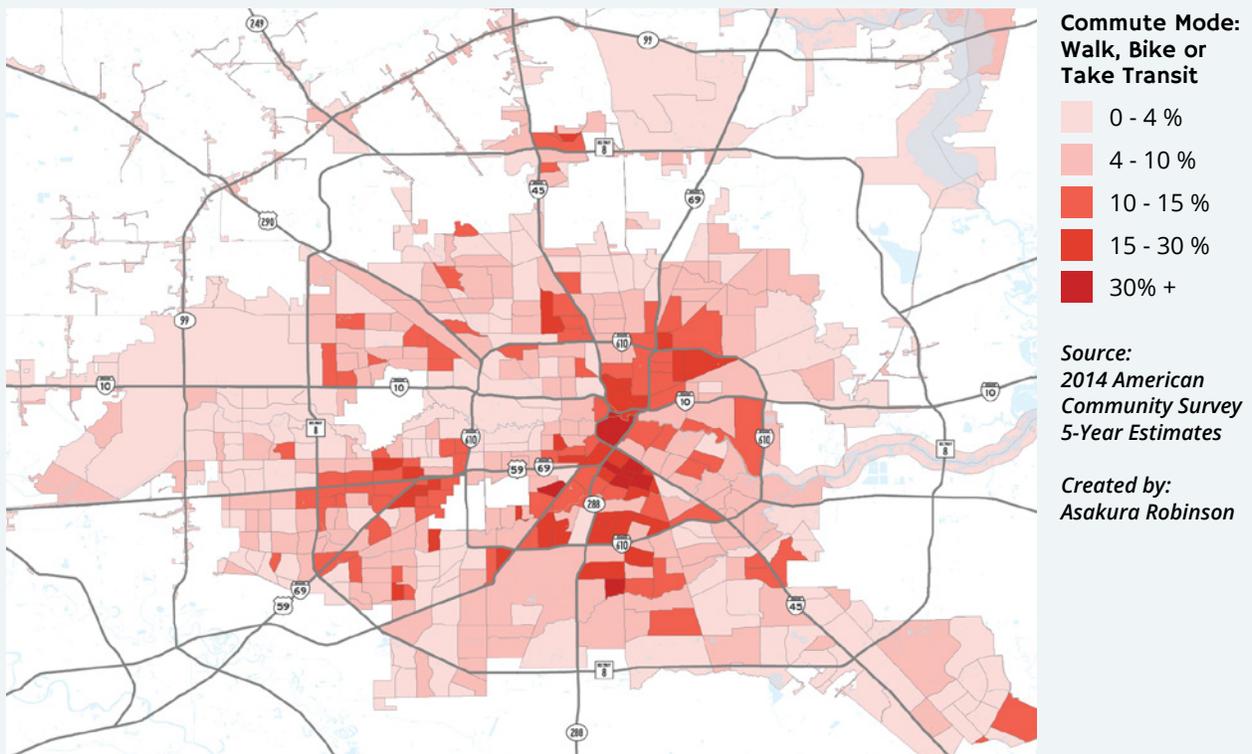
GOAL

Promote the expansion of a multi-modal transportation network that offers safe, convenient and comfortable active transportation options with access to high-quality transit for all users.

LOCAL ASSESSMENT: TRANSPORTATION

Active Transportation plays an important role in helping people lead healthy, active lifestyles by allowing them to safely and conveniently incorporate walking, biking and transit for work, errands, and other everyday trips. Walking and biking are the most intuitive modes for increasing physical activity, but research shows that people who use public transportation take 30% more steps than those who rely on a car.⁵ Because of Houston's size, efficiently serving all areas of the city through these active modes can be challenging, particularly for commute trips that require long trips to job centers across the region. According to the U.S. Census 2014 American Community Survey, 78% of Houstonians drive alone to get to work, 2% walk, 0.5% bike and 4.3% take public transit. Commuting is just one round trip in our everyday lives and there are opportunities for people to use active transportation modes for travel such as shopping trips, library visits, and other neighborhood travel from work and home. Nationwide, 27% of most daily trips are within an easy walking distance (<1 mile) and 48% are within an easy biking distance (<3 miles).⁶

Automobiles will undoubtedly continue to be an important transportation mode for decades to come; but the reduction of our dependence can be achieved through the creation of a strong multi-modal network that builds flexibility into people's everyday lives and resiliency in our future. The completion of the 2017 Houston Bike Plan is one step toward achieving this network.



1

STRATEGY I

Develop a cross media-marketing campaign promoting walking, biking and transit as safe, convenient and comfortable options for commuting to work, school, and other trips.

Transportation stakeholders should continue to offer a combination of events, programs and media messaging to further the campaign. In addition to the Sunday Streets events (see inset next page), these may include a bike to work day, transit to work promotions (“Dump the Pump”), social bike rides, encouraging health promotion messages on billboards, subsidized health club memberships for bicycle friendly businesses, pop-up bike lanes, wayfinding signage, bicycle valet programs, and neighborhood-based encouragement program.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Employers & Businesses
- Public officials & government
- Media
- Community organizations

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Number of active living events or programs hosted
- Number of neighborhoods impacted by programs
- Number of organizations that participate in programs
- Number of participants in encouragement events

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Sign-in sheets
- Surveys



SUNDAY STREETS HOUSTON, TX

Sunday Streets gives Houstonians the opportunity to walk, bike, dance, play and be physically active in many other ways in a segment of the city's largest public space: its streets. This program is Houston's response to the "Open Streets" movement, in which cities temporarily close streets to automobile traffic, allowing people of all ages to be physically active.

Since 2014, the Houston Mayor's Office has held these events on Sunday afternoons throughout the city. They are funded through a combination of public resources and private sponsorships from groups such as Cigna, the Rice Design Alliance, BikeHouston, Houston Tomorrow and Houston BCycle.

Sunday Streets shows that increasing physical activity does not always require new infrastructure but rather changing the way we use the assets we already have. Moreover, Sunday Streets demonstrates the power of public/private partnerships to spur physical activity in Houston neighborhoods.

More information is available at:

www.houstontx.gov/specialevents/sunday-streets.html

CASE STUDY



2

STRATEGY 2

Continue to promote equity in the development of a high-capacity transit network and enhance the first and last mile connections to transit for walkers, rollers and cyclists.

In coordination with METRO, the City of Houston should make access to the transit system as seamless as possible, whether riders are walking, biking or driving to the transit route. Bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, along with amenities such as wayfinding signage, crosswalks and bicycle parking, should be installed near popular stops to enable transit riders to safely and conveniently connect to their destinations. The 2017 Houston Bike Plan provides guidance on priority locations and facility types and should be funded and implemented to advance this strategy.

In cases where transit stops serve very large, auto-oriented suburban areas, such as bus rapid transit and light rail terminals, park-and-ride lots should be built or shared-parking agreements should be made with local providers to attract commuters to job centers who would otherwise choose to drive to their destinations.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Public officials & government
- Community organizations

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Number of bicycle parking facilities near transit
- Number of public destinations with bicycle racks
- Number of schools that apply or implement Safe Routes to School
- Monthly and annual METRO ridership
- Walking, bicycling and transit mode share
- Miles of sidewalks and bikeways constructed near transit stops

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- American Community Survey
- H-GAC
- Department of Public Works and Engineering
- METRO



3

STRATEGY 3

Assess walking conditions throughout the city and develop a pedestrian plan to improve barriers to walkability.

A pedestrian plan would identify the specific problems, such as locations of dangerous walking conditions and gaps in the sidewalk network. The plan would recommend changes to the City’s Infrastructure Design Manual to improve pedestrian facility design and construction and recommend changes to the City’s traffic impact analyses to include pedestrians, cyclists and transit users along with motor vehicles. The plan would also identify funding tools such as Parking Benefit Districts to support the construction of sidewalks and other infrastructure. The public should be involved in selecting the array of engineering strategies to implement. This effort should closely involve the City of Houston Department of Public Works and Engineering and also draw on the findings of previous plans and studies that have surveyed sidewalk conditions including Livable Centers studies supported by HGAC and METRO to create a database of pedestrian conditions across the city. The plan should also reference and tie into ongoing pedestrian safety initiatives, such as the Vision Zero campaign to eliminate pedestrian fatalities.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Public officials & government
- Community organizations

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Walk Scores by neighborhood
- Assessment of sidewalk conditions by neighborhood
- Miles of sidewalks by neighborhood
- Number of pedestrian crashes by neighborhood

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Department of Public Works and Engineering



4

STRATEGY 4

Expand awareness of Travel Demand Management (TDM) initiatives with employers and special purpose districts in Houston's employment centers.

Houston Galveston Area Council (HGAC) and a number of employers offer incentives and resources for alternatives to commuting via single occupancy vehicle. The City of Houston can expand awareness of these initiatives by helping to create a network of employee transportation coordinators among businesses. This network would share best practices, recognize businesses meeting standards, explore opportunities to charge fees for parking, promote the Bicycle Friendly Business program, and develop resource guides for businesses and individuals. These efforts ought to build off of the work already underway by HGAC Commute Solutions.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

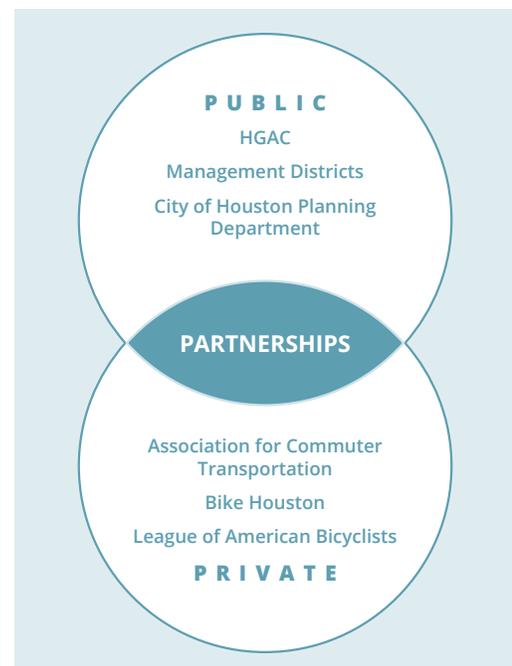
- Employers & businesses
- Public officials & government
- Academic Institutions

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Commute mode share
- Number of individual and organizational participants in Commute Solutions and other TDM initiatives

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Household travel surveys
- American community survey





BUILT ENVIRONMENT

GOAL

Design and build communities that are safe, convenient and attractive for people of all abilities to walk, bike and play.

LOCAL ASSESSMENT: BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The built environment consists of places and spaces that are constructed or modified by people — buildings, parks, roadways, pathways, etc. By designing with people in mind, the physical environment can influence how people move through space, interact with their surroundings, and can be impactful in the decisions people make for active living. There are policies that can be put in place to ensure the built environment encourages active transportation and provides public spaces and amenities for all users to enjoy.

The development of Houston suburbs has shaped the built environment and people’s transportation patterns since the 1950s when construction first began on the highway system. Development patterns have predominantly accommodated automobile flow and parking, rather than creating walkable neighborhoods that are comfortable and attractive for people. One of the contributing factors of Houston’s health crisis is the concept of “time poverty,” in which people spend large amounts of time sitting in cars on long or frequent trips to work, school and other places. Not only do they miss out on a chance to walk places, but they may also resort to convenience options, such as relying on unhealthy fast foods rather than produce-rich, home-cooked meals.



> Significant parking restricts access to shopping



> Sidewalks promote active living

1

STRATEGY I

Promote mixed land uses and infill development to increase density and the potential for equitable transit-oriented development.

The proximity of people’s homes to destinations such as shops, schools, workplaces and amenities impacts a community’s walkability. The closer they are to one another, the more likely people are to walk between them rather than drive. Communities with a mix of land uses and greater density of development organized around transit service have been shown to encourage walking. A study in Seattle found that residents in these types of neighborhoods spent more time in physically active travel than in neighborhoods with low density and separated land uses.⁷

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Public officials and government
- Employers and businesses

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Residential density by neighborhood
- Percentage of land area dedicated to mixed uses
- Proportion of affordable housing compared to the area’s median household income by neighborhood
- Walk score

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Central Houston Commuter Survey
- American Community Survey



2

STRATEGY 2

Operationalize universal design and complete streets criteria into streetscape design standards for new development and roadway reconstruction.

The City of Houston should strengthen its policies and procedures relative to street design, construction, operations and maintenance. This may be first accomplished by translating the Complete Streets executive order, the existing public policy for the right-of-way, into the City Code of Ordinances, and by modifying and improving enforcement of the City's Infrastructure Design Manual. Policy reforms may include creating alternative street classifications; incorporating landscape design, such as street trees and shade structures, into design standards; connecting disjointed segments in complete streets networks; requiring any construction projects to provide pedestrian access/detours; and better maintaining crosswalks.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Employers & Businesses
- Public officials & government
- Health care sector
- Media
- Academic institutions
- Community organizations

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Changes to Infrastructure Design Manual
- Changes to City Code of Ordinances
- Gaps in sidewalk network filled
- Reduction in pedestrian crashes

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Crash data
- Park desert maps



3

STRATEGY 3

Promote Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) approach to improve neighborhood safety and security.

The City should reform its building codes and Infrastructure Design Manual to require or encourage CPTED and begin by retrofitting city-owned facilities. For instance, it should install pedestrian lighting on park properties and its bayou trails while being mindful of “dark sky” principles to prevent light pollution. Funding and administrative support for code enforcement activities should be strengthened accordingly. Consistent with other strategies in this Plan, the City should make sure that curbs and sidewalks are included in road and other development projects. Finally, along with its partners, the City should raise awareness of CPTED principles and techniques through community outreach in coordination with the Police Department. Neighborhoods where high proportions of residents do not have access to a car should be prioritized for implementation of CPTED infrastructure and community outreach.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Media
- Public officials and government
- Community organizations
- Academic institutions

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Modifications to Infrastructure Design Manual and building codes
- Number of facilities retrofitted or built with CPTED principles
- Number of pedestrian lights repaired or installed
- Violent and property crimes per capita, by neighborhood
- Walk Score

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Public Works and Engineering Department
- Planning Department
- Parks District
- Police Department



CASE STUDY

SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOLS HOUSTON

Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS) is a national program designed to encourage children in elementary and middle schools to walk or bike to school. SRTS achieves this through a combination of infrastructure improvement (e.g., adding sidewalks or traffic calming) and non-infrastructure activities (e.g., safety education, promotional events, enforcement, and evaluation activities) that may also reduce the risk of injury to pedestrians and cyclists. Investing in SRTS projects that make walking and bicycling to school safer and easier opens opportunities for those families who want to allow their child to walk or bike but cannot because of safety concerns.

Research shows that physical activity helps kids grow up at a healthy weight and reduces the risk of future chronic disease; however, many kids do not get enough daily physical activity, and without action, a majority of today's children will have obesity at age 35. This has substantial financial implications; obesity is associated with over \$170 billion in excess medical costs per year in the United States.

Every child deserves the opportunity to be healthy, and all kids need opportunities to be physically active, no matter where they live or where they go to school. Over recent decades, the declining rates of using physically active transportation modes like walking and bicycling to school may have contributed to lower than recommended levels of physical activity among youth. In Houston, concerns over pedestrian and bicycle safety may deter parents from allowing their child walk or bike to school. SRTS initiatives are an effective strategy to increase physical activity by promoting safer walking and bicycling opportunities and would be an important component of the City's effort to create safe, efficient and effective alternatives to traveling by car.



The Houston Health Department collaborated with researchers at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health through the CHOICES Learning Collaborative Partnership to envision the implementation of SRTS in Houston. Through this partnership, the Health Department and the Houston Planning and Development Department created a model examining the potential implementation of SRTS initiatives in the Houston Independent School District. Comparing estimated costs and outcomes over a 10-year timeframe, the CHOICES Learning Collaborative Partnership found that the program could be cost-saving overall, with implementation costs offset by savings related to improvements in health outcomes and reductions in vehicle travel. Over the 10-year period, it was estimated that an additional 15,500 children would walk or bike to school, getting 48 more minutes of physical activity weekly than they would otherwise.

These multiple benefits reinforce the importance of investing in effective strategies that promote accessible, safe, and convenient walking and biking options to improve the health of our students and the environments of our local communities.⁸

Implementing Safe Routes to School in Houston is an investment in the future.

By the end of 2027



**276,000
CHILDREN**

would attend schools with safer transportation environments.



**15,500
CHILDREN**

would walk or bike to school.



**48 MORE
MINUTES**

of physical activity per week for students who start walking or biking to school.

LOCAL ASSESSMENT: BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Having access to parks and open spaces for recreation, sports and fitness is one way to promote increased physical activity. As of 2017, the entire City of Houston parks system encompasses 375 parks and over 37,869 acres of park land, per the Houston Parks and Recreation Department. According to a 2014 study by the Trust for Public Land, Houston has 24.1 acres of park land per 1,000 residents within city limits (the national standard is 20 acres per 1,000 people).

The City of Houston Parks and Recreation Department has 56 free fitness facilities across the city, such as swimming pools, sports fields and courts, weight rooms and youth game areas. There are 37 public pools which are essential in the summer months. In addition to these facilities, the Houston Parks Board is connecting 150 miles of trails and greenspace along the bayous, which is expected to transform over 3,000 underutilized acres along the waterways into publicly accessible greenspace. When the trails are complete, over half of Houstonians will live within 1.5 miles of a bayou trail.



> *Kayaking at Discovery Green*



> *Splash Pad at a City of Houston Park*

1

STRATEGY I

Develop shared-use policies with schools and other public properties to increase neighborhood access to playgrounds and other recreation facilities across Houston.

The City should facilitate meetings between decision makers at the Parks Department, cities, counties, Independent School Districts, and owners of public land and help craft policies between organizations. The city should create and approve inter-local agreements. Finally, along with its partners the City should evaluate usage of the shared facilities to measure the agreements' success.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Public officials and government
- Health care
- Community organizations
- Academic institutions

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Number of finalized policies/agreements established or renewed
- Number of properties included
- The population residing within a half mile of public parks and recreation facilities with shared use agreements.

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Meeting minutes
- Share use agreements
- Surveys



2

STRATEGY 2

Develop a comprehensive communication plan to educate the community on the available services, amenities and resources available in parks and their benefits for active living.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

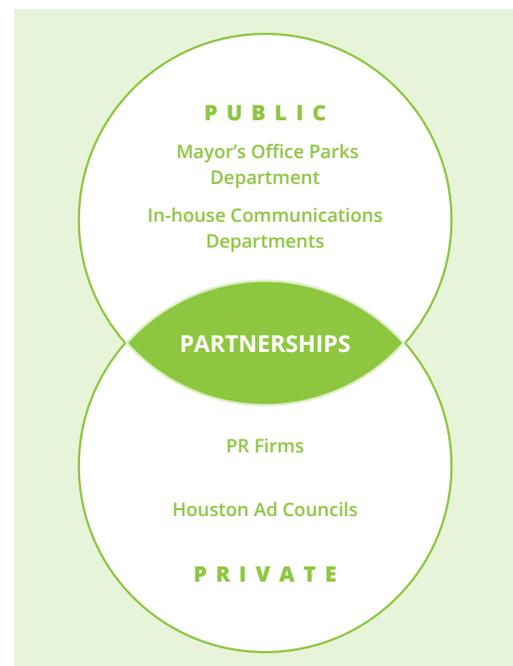
- Public officials and government
- Media
- Employers and businesses
- Health care
- Academic institutions
- Community organizations

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Completion of assessments
- Completion of plan
- Public knowledge and attitudes

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Parks Department
- Community surveys
- Headcounts at facilities



3

STRATEGY 3

Coordinate and leverage resources across the public and private sectors to improve pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access to parks.

First, the City sectors should continue to collaborate and leverage resources across departments. Liaisons and agreements are strategies that could institutionalize communication between departments. The Mayor’s Office can support this city collaboration by supporting the coordination of grant applications.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Business and industry
- Health care
- Education
- Media
- Volunteer and non-profit
- Parks, recreation, fitness and sports
- Transportation, land use and community design
- Public officials & government

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Number of sheltered transit stops at park locations
- Sidewalks within a half mile radius of parks
- Availability of bike parking/ bike racks at parks
- Number of Parks & Recreation liaisons across departments

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- City performance reports



LOCAL ASSESSMENT: SPORTS & FITNESS

Fitness activities, ranging from team sports to zumba, can help Houstonians meet the 75 minutes of weekly vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity recommended by the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. In addition to the Parks and Recreation Department’s free fitness facilities noted in the preceding chapter, the City of Houston is home to hundreds of privately operated gyms, yoga studios, dance studios, YMCAs, and amateur sports leagues. While many are not publicly owned or operated, these facilities nonetheless contribute significant opportunities for Houstonians to be physically active. Houston is also home to numerous major league sports teams: the Astros, Texans, Rockets, Dash and Dynamo put baseball, football, basketball, and women’s and men’s soccer in the spotlight, respectively, and bolster the city’s reputation as a sports town.



> Physical activity at school



> Youth baseball in a community

1

STRATEGY I

Promote sports and fitness through public facilities, schools, parks, worksites and non-traditional spaces.

The City and its partners should develop a comprehensive media campaign utilizing social media, telephone surveys, and print materials such as flyers and postcards.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Business and industry
- Health care
- Education
- Media
- Volunteer and non-profit
- Parks, recreation, fitness and sports
- Transportation, land use and community design
- Public officials & government

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Percentage increase in public knowledge of sports and fitness campaigns
- Percentage increase in usage of sports facilities
- Percentage change in public attitudes toward sports and fitness activities

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Surveys
- Social media activity
- Usage reports from facilities
- Capital improvement requests



2

STRATEGY 2

Launch broad partnership efforts to team with school districts, churches, parents groups, fitness professionals, athletic businesses (e.g. gyms), and adventure sports groups (e.g. skateboarding).

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

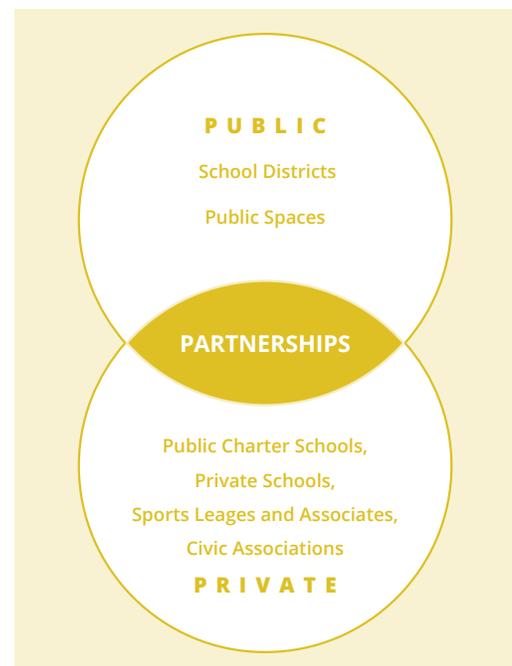
- Business and industry
- Health care
- Education
- Media
- Volunteer and non-profit
- Parks, recreation, fitness and sports
- Transportation, land use and community design
- Public officials & government

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Number of formal partnerships
- Number of meetings
- Number of staff committed
- Existence of annual plan
- Number of new events
- Head counts
- Number of new subscribers to services

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- Budget reports
- Meeting sign-in sheets
- Annual communications plan
- Feedback surveys



3

STRATEGY 3

Promote the creation of wellness programs that incentivize physical activity in worksites.

Employers or worksites should provide wellness opportunities and incentivize employees to make healthy choices. Programs should include those tailored toward the adaptive services community, elderly and youth. The City should design incentives with information gathered at public forums such as discounts and bus passes to advertise through online communications and social networks.

IDENTIFIED SECTORS

- Business and industry
- Health care
- Education
- Media
- Volunteer and non-profit
- Parks, recreation, fitness and sports
- Transportation, land use and community design
- Public officials & government

POTENTIAL INDICATORS

- Number of new gym memberships
- Number of insurance providers offering gym membership incentives
- Number of worksites adopting comprehensive wellness programs

SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES

- American Heart Association
- Surveys
- Meeting sign-ins
- Reports from participating companies



CITATIONS:

¹ **Hu FB.** *Sedentary lifestyle and risk of obesity and type 2 diabetes.* PubMed. 2003;382): 103-8. <<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12733740>>

² **University of Texas, School of Public Health.** *Health of Houston Survey,* 2010

³ **Pew Research Center.** *America's Changing Religious Landscape.* May 12, 2015. <<https://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>>

⁴ **Beretto, Holly.** *Life in the Big City: Downtown Residential Comes Into Its Own.* *Downtown Houston.* 02, June 2014. Available at <<https://www.downtownhouston.org/news/article/life-big-city>>

⁵ **Edwards, R.** *Public Transit, Obesity, and Medical Costs: Assessing the Magnitudes.* *Preventative Medicine,* 46(1): 14-21, January 2008.

⁶ **Buehler, R, Götschi, T, Winters, M.** *Moving Toward Active Transportation: How Policies Can Encourage Walking and Bicycling.* San Diego, CA: Active Living Research; 2016. Available at <www.activelivingresearch.org>.

⁷ **Frank LD, Sallis JF, Conway TL, Chapman JE, Saelens BE, Bachman W.** *Many pathways from land use to health: associations between neighborhood walkability and active transportation, body mass index, and air quality.* *J Am Plann Assoc.* 2006; 72:75–87.

⁸ **Reiner J., Barrett J., Giles C., Cradock A.** *Houston Safe Routes to School [Issue Brief].* Houston Health Department, Houston, TX and the CHOICES Learning Collaborative Partnership at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Boston, MA; December 2019.

Cover — Icons from *The Noun Project*:

Kayak by **Will Deskins**

Train by **Edwin Bosveld**

Tennis rackets by **Mister Pixel**

Trees by **Cagri Yurtbasi**

Dancer, baseball and bat, bowling ball and pins, gymnast, hockey sticks, fishing rod, and volleyball by **Norbert Kucsera**

Touchdown by **Nathan Driskell**

Cyclist by **Creative Stall**

Person walking by **Christopher Smith**

Cargo bike by **Jule Steffen & Matthias Schmidt**

Skateboard by **LeftHanded Graphic**

Tennis court by **Sergey Demushkin**

Jump roper by **Mcarranza**

Swimming pool by **Larisa Skosyrska**

Pingpong by **Ralf Schmitzer**

Bench by **Creative Stall**

Runner by **Gregor Črešnar**

Swimmer by **DANT**

Basketball hoop by **Nikita Kozin**

Wheelchair by **Moose Icons**

Walking stick by **RocketDiction**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This update to the Houston Active Living Plan would not have been possible without the efforts of the Active Living Plan Subcommittee, Go Healthy Houston Task Force, the City of Houston Health Department, community organizations, and the many private citizens who participated in the planning and discussion process. We are grateful for the time and energy that these individuals and community leaders have devoted to helping to improve the state of active living in Houston.

This update was made possible through grant funding provided by the Texas Department of State Health Services' Texas Healthy Communities Program.



www.gohealthyhouston.org



www.houstontx.gov/health

— Original report prepared by Asakura Robinson



ASAKURA
ROBINSON

— Update prepared by Outreach Strategists



