

**Audio Clip: Improving the Built Environment to Increase Physical Activity**

**Speakers:** Shiriki Kumanyika, David Hopkins, Chris Kochtitzky

**Moderator:** John Anderton

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[John Anderton] Welcome to The Community Guide's audio series, *In Their Own Words*. I'm John Anderton. Today we're talking about the Community Preventive Services Task Force recommendation for combined built environment intervention approaches to increase physical activity.

Joining me today are doctors Shiriki Kumanyika and David Hopkins, and Mr. Chris Kochtitzky. Dr. Kumanyika is a member of the Community Preventive Services Task Force and a research professor in the Department of Community Health and Prevention at the Drexel University, Dornsife School of Public Health.

Dr. Hopkins is a scientist with CDC's Community Guide Branch, and led the team that conducted the systematic review of evidence on built environment approaches. And Mr. Kochtitzky is an urban planner and senior advisor with CDC's Physical Activity and Health Branch.

Dr. Hopkins, what are combined built environment intervention approaches?

[David Hopkins] The Community Preventive Services Task Force recommendation is for built environment intervention approaches that combine one or more interventions to improve transportation systems with one or more land use and community design interventions to increase physical activity.

In other words, combined approaches connect activity-friendly routes to everyday destinations, and they make it safe and convenient for people of all abilities to walk, run, bike, skate, or use wheelchairs.

[John Anderton] Chris, these sound large and complicated.

[Chris Kochtitzky] They can be. But they can also be smaller interventions that enhance or build on features already in place— such as bike racks, traffic signals, or crosswalks that make a community more pedestrian or bike-friendly. Communities are encouraged to start where they can and then build toward larger scale improvements to increase physical activity. We like to think of it as activity-friendly routes to those everyday destinations.

[John Anderton] The Task Force recommendation is based on a systematic review of the evidence. Dr. Hopkins, how would you describe The Community Guide's systematic review process?

[David Hopkins] A systematic review is a review of all available scientific studies on a specific topic. We used a formal process to identify all relevant studies, assess their quality, and summarize the evidence. For this review, we considered evidence from 90 studies that used diverse designs, compared different combinations of interventions or existing built environment characteristics, and evaluated long-term effects on physical activity.

[John Anderton] Dr. Kumanyika, tell us why this Task Force finding is important.

[Shiriki Kumanyika] Well, it's important because regular physical activity is one of the most important things people can do for their health. It can help us control our weight, for example. It reduces the risk for cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and some cancers. It can improve our mental health and our mood.

And yet, only about half of adults, and a quarter of high school students in the United States, get the recommended amounts of aerobic physical activity or moderate, or you know, at least moderate physical activity, which is the type that has health benefits.

It's difficult for people to find time to be physically active; some people can't afford to pay for things like a gym membership. And we need to build activity into our lives and make it easier – something that we do incidentally without having to plan for it all the time.

The systematic review shows that combined built environment intervention approaches do, in fact, increase physical activity. Combinations of activity-supportive built environment characteristics were associated with higher levels of transportation-related physical activity, recreational physical activity, and total walking.

This was a very complex review, but the Task Force prioritized it because of the potential impact.

[John Anderton] Speaking of impact, Chris, how will states and communities use this Task Force finding?

[Chris Kochtitzky] CDC's Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity has three funding programs that will run through 2023 and fund states, communities, and universities to support implementation of this built environment recommendation. In the first program, states will support local public health partners and partners in other sectors, such as transportation and community planning, to create safe and accessible community environments. In the second program, land grant universities will work through county extension services to create safe, activity-friendly environments in counties where the adult obesity rate is over 40%. And in the last program, communities across the country will develop culturally-tailored built environment interventions to increase physical activity among populations at highest risk for chronic disease.

In addition, we've developed products that communities can use to move from these cross-sector coalitions that are interested in promoting the built environment to the stage of development, implementation, evaluation, and maintenance of community-wide efforts. We also feature real-world examples that show built environment and transportation approaches that communities have used to inspire and bolster others who are considering an intervention.

[John Anderton] Share a few of these real-world examples.

[Chris Kochtitzky] I'd be happy to. A neighborhood in St. Louis, Missouri, used traffic calming techniques to slow traffic in a busy area served by four different bus stops. This made it easier and safer for residents to get to the bus stops, and these buses connected residents to everyday destinations.

In another case, in Weslaco, Texas, students, school officials, and the city's public works department partnered to paint a new crosswalk to more safely connect the school to the community and the surrounding neighborhood.

And then, on a larger scale, here in Atlanta. The BeltLine project converted abandoned railways into trails, parks, light-rail transit, high-density residential buildings, and commercial developments. Once completed, the BeltLine will cover 22 miles of pathways and connect 45 neighborhoods and council districts.

[John Anderton] Dr. Kumanyika, your thoughts?

[Shiriki Kumanyika] It's exciting to see built environment approaches in action, and we look forward to watching the new CDC grantees apply the Task Force recommendations to improve their communities and increase physical activity.

[John Anderton] Doctors Kumanyika and Hopkins, and Mr. Kochtitzky, thank you for joining me today to talk about these new Community Preventive Services Task Force findings for combined built environment intervention approaches.

Visit The Community Guide at [thecommunityguide.org](http://thecommunityguide.org) for more information about the systematic review and Task Force finding. You'll also find links to the Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity web page, the implementation products mentioned, and other useful resources.