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The Promoting Active Communities Award: Improvement of Michigan's Self-Assessment Tool

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Background: This project updated and improved the Promoting Active Communities Award (PAC), a Web-based assessment that enables communities to scrutinize their programs, policies, and environments related to physical activity, generating ideas and community commitment for improvements. **Methods:** A literature review, focus groups, and expert review guided PAC improvements. **Results:** Over 150 articles and audit measures in the fields of transportation, public health, and urban planning were reviewed. Indicators were identified, categorized, and evaluated for use in the PAC. Focus group participants communicated motivations, processes, and obstacles for completing the PAC and developing an action plan. Participants requested technical information to guide them in achieving active-living environments. **Conclusions:** Information gathered was used to improve the PAC Web site. A technical assistance document, Design Guidelines for Active Michigan Communities, was created to aid communities in creating active-living environments. The new PAC and Design Guidelines are available for public use at www.mihealthtools.org/communities.

Keywords: physical activity, health promotion, active living, public health, assessment tool

Public health professionals and researchers recognize the positive effects of physical activity on physical and emotional health.¹ Reengineering physical activity into daily routines holds significant promise to remedy poor health statistics. Current research suggests that the built environment and programming, and the policies that shape them, are all important in creating a supportive environment in

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which moderate levels of physical activity can be achieved. Reviews by the Task Force on Community Preventive Services have concluded that there is strong or sufficient evidence to recommend a variety of interventions to public health practitioners and community decision-makers to increase levels of physical activity in our communities.² Among potential interventions identified are community-wide campaigns and creation of or enhanced access to places for physical activity, combined with informational outreach activities, community-scale urban-design and land-use policies and practices, and street-scale urban-design and land-use policies and practices.²

The State of Michigan has been particularly concerned with declining physical activity, rising obesity, urban sprawl, and associated health and economic effects. From a health perspective, Michigan has reason to worry; the State has consistently had one of the highest rates of obesity in the nation, and daily levels of physical activity remain stubbornly below the Surgeon General's recommendations.³ Results from the 2005 Michigan Behavioral Risk Factor Survey show that 62.5% of Michigan adults are classified as either overweight or obese, and 50.5% of Michigan adults failed to achieve the minimum recommended amount of daily physical activity (at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity 5 or more days per week or 20 minutes of vigorous physical activity 3 days per week).⁴ Simultaneously, Michigan's land use and development patterns also give rise to concern. For example, in 2002, the Detroit metropolitan statistical area was ranked the 15th most-sprawling urban area in the United States.^{5,6}

Following the release of the 1996 Surgeon General's report on physical activity and health⁷ and inspired by the launching of a physical activity initiative by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention called America In Motion, leaders at Michigan's Department of Community Health (MDCH) and the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness, Health and Sports (GC) formulated a state-wide initiative on physical activity. The initiative's objectives were to (1) make it easier for people to be physically active by addressing physical activity environments and (2) promote change in policies that influence those environments. The new initiative was centered on the Michigan Promoting Active Communities Award (PAC), a self-assessment process that enables communities to scrutinize their programs, policies, and environments related to physical activity. The PAC self-assessment is conducted by Michigan cities, towns, townships, and villages. Based on their responses to assessment questionnaire items, points are awarded, and communities are recognized with 1 of 5 award levels. An annual award ceremony is held to honor PAC communities and their representatives. Since 2001, more than 80 Michigan communities have completed the PAC and received an award.

In 2003, the Prevention Research Center of Michigan and the University of Michigan School of Public Health, MDCH, the GC, and Michigan State University partnered on a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)-funded project to improve, enhance, and evaluate the PAC. The main objectives of the project were (1) to improve an easy-to-use, Internet-based self-assessment tool for Michigan communities to facilitate positive policy and environmental change for increased levels of physical activity and (2) to develop a way that the tool could provide data for community, state, and national surveillance and planning. This paper describes the initial *improvement phase* of the project, which redesigned and launched an enhanced PAC Web site and assessment tool.

Methods

The project employed community-based participatory research, a collaborative approach to research that equitably involves stakeholders and researchers in the research process. Community-based participatory research recognizes all partners' unique contributions, shares responsibility and credit for the project among the partners, and uses new knowledge to take action to improve the well-being of community members. The project was guided by a State Steering Committee (SSC) consisting of (1) the investigators; (2) experts from relevant areas, including transportation, legislation, health care, public health, recreation, urban planning, law enforcement, and land use; and (3) representatives from communities in various stages of implementing the PAC. The SSC participated in all aspects of the project including developing and implementing project protocols, interpreting the results, assisting with PAC improvements and additions, promoting the revised PAC, and reporting findings.

The primary goal of this phase of the project was to establish face and content validity for the PAC. Face validity assessed whether the PAC logically appears to assess policy, programmatic, and environmental conditions of communities.^{8,9} Content validity checked whether the PAC questionnaire items are consistent with the current evidence base for active communities.⁸ Recognition of the importance of these 2 aspects of validity was at the forefront of the work of the investigators and the SSC as they were suggesting improvements, additions, and deletions to the PAC.

Information needed for improvement and enhancement of the PAC and establishing face and content validity were generated through multiple methods: (1) review of existing research, assessment tools, and best-practice manuals regarding the relationships among policies, the built environment, and physical activity; (2) focus-group discussions with users of the existing tool and neighborhood leaders; (3) compilation of educational materials and Web links; and (4) expert review of a draft PAC and related educational materials.

Review of Research, Assessment Tools, and Best-Practices Manuals

The literature review was structured around constructs and measures thought to influence physical activity (indicators) and physical activity outcomes. The review focused on the validity, reliability, and overall quality of indicators and information about the strength of their relationship to physical activity outcomes. The review of research began with 2 bibliographies—1 produced by the Active Living Policy and Environmental Studies Program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation¹⁰ and 1 produced by the CDC.¹¹ The review included published literature between 1980 and September 2005. To locate additional published research, keyword searches were conducted using the online journal indexes MEDLINE and Wilson Select. Categories of indicators and physical activity and health-outcome terms were selected from an initial scan of the literature, and keyword search terms were assigned to each category. For example, in the policy-indicator category, search terms included *zoning*, *budget*, *planning*, *funds*, and *construction*, among others. The sidewalks indicator category included terms such as *continuity*, *maintenance*, *width*, *surface*, and *material*. Physical activity-outcome terms included *bicycling*, *biking*, *cycling*,

exercise, fitness walking, obesity, physical activity, physical fitness, recreation, running, and walking. Keyword searches combined each indicator-category term with each physical activity-outcome term. Once relevant research articles were identified, results were entered into a Microsoft Access database in which each indicator was paired with 1 or more outcome categories.

The literature review also included an inventory of existing tools used to assess physical environment and policy indicators at the community and neighborhood level. Best-practices manuals in the areas of multimodal transportation and recreation spaces were also used to identify understudied or inconclusive concepts and indicators that experts believe were related to physical activity. Examples of assessment tools reviewed include the Neighborhood Environment Walkability Survey (NEWS)¹² and the Walking and Biking Suitability Assessment (WABSA).^{13,14} Examples of best-practice manuals include *Traffic Calming: State of the Practice*,¹⁵ *Best Development Practices*,¹⁶ and *Planning for Street Connectivity: Getting from Here to There*.¹⁷

Based on this literature review, a comprehensive list of indicators was developed to guide the revision of individual PAC questionnaire items and sections.

Focus Groups

Two important goals of the PAC-improvement process were assuring that the PAC was useful to communities and that the information needed to complete the PAC was easily accessible by community members. To address these goals, information was gathered about needs and wants of the end users through 5 focus-group discussions (40 participants total) held in 4 locations. Focus-group protocols were approved by the Institutional Review Boards of the University of Michigan School of Public Health, Michigan State University, and the MDCH. For 3 of the focus groups, participants had previously been involved in conducting the PAC assessment between 2000 and 2003. For these previous-users groups, the discussion guidelines addressed the following topics: the process communities used to complete the PAC, the PAC assessment tool, the PAC award system, and the possible addition of a neighborhood component to the PAC.

The remaining 2 focus groups were held with representatives of neighborhoods that might in the future be involved in completing a new neighborhood-specific component of the PAC assessment. Participants were asked to identify neighborhood factors that support or act as barriers to physical activity. Residents were also asked to give their perspective on how neighborhoods could effect change and whether they would become involved in the PAC assessment process.

Each of the focus groups was audiotaped and transcribed. In addition, an assistant moderator took field notes during the group discussion. The available transcripts and field notes were then coded using qualitative data analysis software, Atlas.ti, in a process called code mapping. An initial set of codes was developed to correspond with each question in the discussion guidelines for that focus group. Additional codes were then identified for topics that arose during the focus group sessions that might be of special interest during data analysis. Frequently occurring topics or themes were identified. Because the focus group discussions resulted in a diversity of perspectives that might prove valuable during the revision and expansion of the PAC, comments made by only 1 or 2 individuals were also considered in the analysis.

Compilation of Educational Materials and Web Links

A key component of the original PAC self-assessment tool was a set of educational materials and informational Web links directly tied to each content area. The PAC improvement expanded and improved the educational content on the PAC Web site. Enhancements were informed by the literature review, a search for Web sites with practical information, and a search for educational print material available on active living and community design. Best practices for active communities were summarized in a new document entitled *Design Guidelines for Active Michigan Communities (Design Guidelines)*. The document was linked to the PAC assessment sections and individual questions, so users of the improved PAC could see photographs, illustrations, and ideas that correspond to each content area.

Expert Review

For the final stage of the PAC revision, a comprehensive list of potential PAC questionnaire items was developed, with each item supported by the literature review and focus-group discussions as being important for promoting physical activity in communities. The complete list was submitted to the SSC as well as to 25 Michigan and national experts for review. Reviewers were asked to score each draft item in the assessment on scales of 1 to 10 for 3 characteristics: item clarity, item importance, and ease of obtaining the information. Reviewers were provided space to enter written comments on each item and were also asked to identify important concepts that were missed, concepts that should be deleted, and whether the PAC adequately addressed issues of equity of physical activity resources in communities. Finally, they were asked their overall impressions of the PAC.

In addition, reviewers were asked to comment on the concepts and content of the *Design Guidelines*. Specifically, reviewers were asked to identify any content they believed to be inaccurate, misleading, or unclear and to comment on important concepts that might have been missed, concepts that should be removed, and their overall impressions of the *Design Guidelines*.

Reviewers included university faculty in relevant fields of study around the United States, planners from city departments and private planning firms, representatives from governmental agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, State of Michigan Transportation and Health Departments, local health departments, bicycling advocacy groups, and other relevant experts in the field of built environment and physical activity (see the Acknowledgments for a complete list of reviewers).

Results

Review of Research, Assessment Tools, and Best Practices Manuals

The search of the scientific literature yielded 144 research articles that met criteria. Indicators (independent variables) were identified and divided into 15 categories. Physical activity-outcome variables were divided into 3 major categories: transportation activity (walking or biking for transportation), recreation activity

(walking for recreation and general, moderate, vigorous, leisure-time, or other physical activity), and weight (body mass index, obesity, or overweight status). Many of the research studies included outcome variables in more than 1 category. In order to assess strength of evidence, results were also categorized by type of research study. The 144 studies were primarily cross-sectional, with some case studies and cohort studies. There were few studies with experimental or quasi-experimental design.

Although results for each indicator differed, most studies showed positive or nonsignificant relationships between indicators and outcome variables. The bicycle amenities, street connectivity, and transit categories had no negative findings. Most of the other categories (crime safety, density and intensity of development, design and aesthetics, information and programming, land use mixture, neighborhood type, physical activity facilities, parks and open space, policy, sidewalks, streets, and trails) had primarily positive findings, with some nonsignificant and few negative findings. The results for traffic-safety measures were inconclusive with most of findings falling in the nonsignificant category, and the results for the transit category were split relatively evenly between positive and nonsignificant. It is noteworthy that very few studies fell in the policy category. The effects of policy on physical activity have not been extensively studied, and further research is warranted. Examples of individual indicators that were found to be positively associated with physical activity in the literature review and sample PAC assessment items are available at http://www.mihealthtools.org/communities/documents/PAC_lit_review.pdf.

In addition to scientific research articles, also considered were review articles, theoretical papers, assessment tools, and best-practices manuals. The overall review generated 2 products that contributed to the PAC improvement process: (1) a theoretical model on how community-level interventions can improve policies and environments for physical activity and (2) an active living design elements matrix.

Theoretical Model. All PAC improvements were consistent with the theoretical model shown in Figure 1. The model is based on several theory papers,^{18,19} the review of research and best practices described above, and organizational empowerment theory.²⁰⁻²² The theoretical model hypothesizes that interventions to create community change for physical activity require planning and implementation by interdisciplinary advocacy teams or coalitions that include representatives of agencies or organizations that will ultimately participate in change processes. Central to the success of the coalition is empowerment. Empowerment theory suggests that an organization or coalition is empowered if individuals in the organization have the cognitive and behavioral skills necessary to critically understand their social and political environments and become problem-solvers and decision-makers.^{21,22}

Through the literature review, distinct domains were identified in which a community coalition can affect change in its community that could ultimately affect its community's physical activity levels. These domains are organized under the general constructs of policies and environments. The theoretical model illustrates the hypothesis that policies, programs, and environments can influence the motivation, knowledge, skills, perceptions, and access of individuals to physical activity, which in turn will affect overall population levels of physical activity. Items for each of the domains identified in the theoretical model were included in the PAC assessment.

Agencies/Organizations

- Local/State governments
 - Parks and recreation
 - Transportation
 - Law enforcement
 - Planning/Zoning
 - Elected officials
- Schools
 - Administration
 - Parents
 - Teachers
 - Students
- Work sites
 - Employers
 - Employees
 - Unions
- Health care
 - Public Health
 - Medical
 - Hospitals
 - Health Insurance
- Nonprofit organizations
 - Churches/Religious orgs
 - Advocacy
- Media
 - Architects/Planners
 - Neighborhood orgs
 - University research
 - Service organizations
 - Sports teams/Fitness facilities

Empowered coalition (Interdisciplinary)

Policies supportive of PA

- Policies and resources for the built environment
- Planning docs
 - Zoning
 - Ordinances/Codes
 - Site plan review
 - Budgets
 - Parking standards
 - Maintenance
 - Active transport
 - Transit

- Resources & infrastructure for interpersonal relationships
- Safety education
 - Crime prevention
 - Injury prevention

- Policies and incentives for PA programs/promotion
- Schools
 - Work sites
 - Community

Environments supportive of PA

- Constructed environment/design
- Street/Sidewalks
 - Land use mix
 - Connectivity
 - Crosswalks/Traffic
 - Lighting
 - Parks, rec facilities
 - Trails
 - Transit
 - Bicycle facilities
 - Neighborhoods
 - Downtown
 - Shopping areas

- Social environments
- Crime/Safety
 - Crime watches/Neighborhood orgs

- Information/Programming environments
- Schools
 - Work sites
 - Media campaigns

- Individual PA
- Motivation
 - Knowledge
 - Skills
 - Perceptions
 - Access

Increased population levels of physical activity

Figure 1 — Theoretical model: community-level interventions to promote physical activity.

Active Living Design Elements Matrix. The active living design elements matrix pulled together the results of the scientific literature and best-practices manuals²³⁻²⁷ review and linked them to policy recommendations at the local level. It informed both the PAC content improvements and the enhanced educational content of the PAC. The matrix identified elements of the built environment with a relationship to greater physical activity (eg, sidewalks, street lighting, and mixed land uses) and described policy or regulatory changes likely to ensure provision of each element. Although few research studies have been conducted linking local policies and plans to physical activity outcomes, a summary of the best thinking available was deemed necessary because such policies and their related design standards set the parameters for local government decision-making and development.²⁵ The matrix included elements that researchers and practitioners view as significant.^{15,169} ■ The active living design elements matrix is included as a reference document in the *Design Guidelines* (www.mihealthtools.org/communities/default.asp?tab=designguidelines).

Focus Groups

The focus groups generated several findings that were helpful in the PAC revisions. Communities mentioned 6 motivations for completing the PAC: public relations, the opportunity for self-assessment, recognition for accomplishments, promoting physical activity and healthy lifestyles, encouragement from an elected official, and funding opportunities, with the most frequently cited reason being public relations. Communities were drawn by the prospect of winning a prestigious award that could be placed on a community's Web site or used by the local Chamber of Commerce. As one participant summarized, "It's really a way of promoting your community and inviting people to recognize the assets you have in your community."

The focus groups also yielded helpful information on the processes used for completing the assessment. Most communities had a lead person who collected information from others; this person generally was an employee of the local government unit. In a few cases, individuals took responsibility or existing committees were used to complete the PAC. None of the communities represented in the focus groups formed a new committee expressly for the purpose of completing the assessment, although collaboration was indicated as important to completing the assessment.

The previous users groups also indicated several obstacles to finishing the PAC. Most significantly, the original PAC required that information be gathered from schools and from the four largest local employers. Schools were found to be the greatest challenge. School district boundaries do not necessarily correspond with local government boundaries. The variety of programs offered in different schools (eg, walking clubs, availability of physical education classes) made any generalization in responses to PAC questionnaire items more difficult. Finally, schools were portrayed as reluctant to share information with outsiders, potentially because of fear of bad public relations, or they did not trust or understand the intent of the assessment.

Other challenges communities reported included specific indicators that were out of date, off target, had unclear language, were difficult or impossible to achieve, had liability or risk-management issues, and involved collecting information that was difficult to find.

PAC Improvements

PAC improvements were generated through an iterative process using information gleaned from each of the methods described above. Expansion and improvements were made to the PAC in 4 areas: (1) overall content and relevance of the point system, (2) specificity and user-friendliness, (3) education component, and (4) the feedback report.

Overall Content and Point System. A complete list of the sections, subcategories, and point assignments within each section of the updated PAC are shown in Table 1. The sections and items were generated based on the theoretical model and active living design elements matrix. The overall content improvements included additions/deletions of components assessed, additions/deletions of specific indicators,

Table 1 Promoting Active Communities Award Scoring Sections

Section	Maximum possible score	Scoring category ^a
1. Community planning	47	All B
community commitment to active living	2	B
community planning documents	25	B
government support for active living	20	B
2. Ordinances, zoning, and codes	58	All B
zoning	12	B
sidewalks	21	B
street trees	2	B
redevelopment	1	B
connectivity	6	B
dogs	1	B
crossing areas	7	B
parking standards	7	B
access management	1	B
3. Site plan review process	18	All B
4. Maintenance	14	All A
5. Programs, promotions, and facilities for physical activity	49	A and C
programming and promotion	23	C
recreation facilities	13	A
parks	7	A
trails or shared-use path	6	A
6. Safety and security policies and education	13	All C
education	2	C
injury prevention	2	C
security from crime	9	C

Table 1 (continued)

Section	Maximum possible score	Scoring category ^a
7. Bicycle facilities	13	All A
8. Public transportation	19	All A
9. Downtown	36	All A
presence of a downtown	5	A
mixed land use and accessibility	13	A
sidewalks	6	A
crosswalks	4	A
streetscape	4	A
lighting	1	A
parking	2	A
crime	1	A
10. Shopping areas	15	All A
accessibility	3	A
sidewalks	3	A
streetscapes	2	A
lighting	1	A
crosswalks and traffic	4	A
parking	2	A
11. Schools	22	All C
healthy school action tool	1	C
safe routes to school	10	C
physical education	5	C
other activity opportunities	3	C
physical activities policies	3	C
12. Neighborhoods	21	A and C
services nearby	4	A
access to services	2	A
streets in the neighborhood	2	A
places for walking and cycling	2	A
neighborhood surroundings	2	A
neighborhood safety	7	A and C
recreation	2	C
13. Work sites	30	All C
work-site promotion of physical activity	15	C
promotion of physical activity for public employees	15	C
Total	355	

^a Scoring categories: A, Current environment; B, Community policies and planning; C, Programming and promotion.

and changes in question design. Content validity of the final tool was assessed by comparing the final tool with each of the constructs described in the theoretical model and active living design elements matrix. The point assignments were revised to better reflect the relative importance of each questionnaire item in affecting physical activity. Relative importance was determined by the strength of the association between the indicator addressed by the item with physical activity outcomes and by expert opinion (see the following Expert Review section).

Specificity and User-Friendliness. Another improvement in the PAC was incorporation of new modules that objectively assess specific locations in the community. This addition addresses the barrier identified by focus group participants that it was difficult to generalize about an entire community when policies, programs, and physical environments can vary dramatically from one neighborhood or area to another within the same community. In the revised PAC, communities are asked to provide information about 5 specific sections of the community (1 each): school, work site, neighborhood, shopping areas, and the downtown area. The boundaries of each of the five sections were self-identified by the communities.²⁸ A modified version of the NEWS¹² was used to assess the neighborhood section. Each of these 5 modules can stand alone for use by coalitions, neighborhood groups, or community organizations such as Downtown Development Authorities to complement the larger PAC assessment. In the future, the PAC will be expanded to incorporate information on multiple neighborhoods, work sites, and schools from each community.

Education Component. The supplementary educational material and resource links on the PAC Web site were also updated and improved. A new document, *Design Guidelines for Active Michigan Communities* was developed to assist Michigan communities to identify change opportunities in land use, physical design, policies, and planning to build healthier communities. The *Design Guidelines* were written for a lay audience. It is available as a printed book and as a Web document that is integrated into the PAC self-assessment. It includes both construction design elements (sidewalks, street crossings, traffic calming, shared-use paths and trails, and street design) and planning and regulatory guidance for developing plans, ordinances, and codes. The book also includes a glossary of active-living terminology and an extensive list of active-living and recreation resources.

In the new PAC, revised instructions strongly encourage community members and leaders to form teams or coalitions to complete the PAC or to work within an existing health or nonmotorized transportation coalition. Working within a diverse team speeds the collection of information needed for completion of the PAC and also encourages the development of a permanent coalition that can act upon the information learned throughout the process.

Feedback Report. All communities who complete the improved PAC assessment are provided with a detailed community-feedback report. This report includes a summary of how they scored by section, as well as in the 3 main categories of questionnaire items: Current Environments, Policies and Planning, and Programming and Promotion (Table 1). The report compares their score with the maximum possible score. Seeing this information immediately conveys in which areas the communities have done well and in which there is room for improvement. Communities can then use this information in their planning processes. These reports are important

tools for empowerment of local stakeholders because they help provide the skills and information necessary to critically assess and understand their community's social and political landscapes and make decisions accordingly.

The personalized community reports also show communities how they compare to the average (mean) score of other communities by size (small, medium, and large), adding a motivational element of competition with other communities. None of the Michigan communities that have completed the PAC have yet received the highest level of award, and many want to be the first to do so.

Expert Review

The expert review of the PAC and the *Design Guidelines for Active Michigan Communities* generated valuable input for fine-tuning the tools. Experts used a 10-point scale to rate individual PAC questionnaire items on importance to promoting physical activity and ease of finding the necessary information. The average importance ratings ranged from 4.8 to 9.7, and the average ease of finding information ratings ranged from 4.4 to 9.0. These numbers helped to guide decisions on which items should be deleted or altered to make them easier to answer and served as the basis for assigning point values to each item. Items with low ratings for importance or ease were examined by the investigators and removed if appropriate. The reviewers' feedback also helped to improve the wording of questionnaire items. Reviewers commented that some items were "vague" or "too broad." Such items were revised to make wording clear and more precise to the specific concept being assessed.

Overall, expert feedback on the *Design Guidelines* was positive, as exemplified by the following reviewer comment: "I love the specific community examples you have included—lends validity and gives a 'can do' feeling of inspiration." Many reviewers identified topics that needed more information or clarification such as "The road diet concept is not captured." Expert recommendations for clarity and wording were essential to making the *Design Guidelines* clear and easy to read for laypeople.

Relaunch of PAC Web Site

During late fall of 2005, the updated PAC, *Design Guidelines*, and resources were installed on the PAC Web site. The updated PAC was launched in May 2006. Reintroduction of the PAC was timed with a marketing initiative conducted by MDCH and the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness aimed to increase use of the PAC Web site.

Conclusions

The PAC is a valuable tool for assessing community characteristics that support physical activity. Although the state of the science does not yet permit authoritative assignment of causality between many community characteristics and physical activity outcomes, the PAC was developed with content and face validity in mind. Both the research evidence and expert opinion support the appropriateness of the content and approach used in the PAC.

The PAC assessment process has been found to be feasible for communities to use. Over 80 communities have completed the assessment to date, including 17 using the new version launched in 2006. The PAC's combination of evidence-based items and educational content support the empowerment of community groups that wish to assess their current community situation and then work to make it easier for residents to be physically active. The award and recognition system tied to the PAC are important motivators for initiating the assessment process. Given its capacity for both empowerment and motivation, the PAC holds the potential to be a driving force in public health efforts to assist local communities in making their communities more supportive of physical activity. Earlier paper-and-pencil versions of the PAC have been replicated and used by several other state health departments in their own efforts. The new PAC offers the potential for new national collaborations.

In addition, the *Design Guidelines for Active Living* is a valuable new resource for understanding what makes active living possible in communities. Its jargon-free language and visually appealing format make it helpful for lay audiences. It can be useful for public health practitioners working toward active living but who might not yet be familiar with the planning and engineering vocabulary generally used in active-living guides.

Finally, the Web-based assessment process anchored in best practices and evidence-based indicators lends itself to eventual development of state- and national-level surveillance systems tracking progress toward policy and environmental changes that will promote physical activity. The second phase of this project is currently underway—working with the communities who completed the PAC in 2006 to evaluate how well use of the PAC (1) facilitates positive policy and environmental changes to promote physical activity and (2) assesses policy and environmental conditions that are associated with promoting physical activity at the community level. The results of these evaluations will be used to select indicators that Michigan and other states can use for surveillance.

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