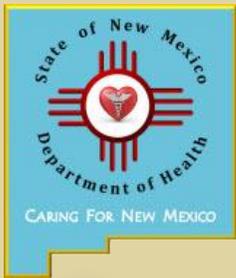


Social Support for Physical Activity



PREVENTION RESEARCH CENTER
Prevention & Population Sciences

hsc.unm.edu/som/prc



www.stepintocuba.org

National recommendations call for regular physical activity (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2008). The Guide to Community Preventive Services (Community Preventive Services Task Force) recommends successful community strategies to increase physical activity. Cuba, New Mexico, has applied many of these strategies. The Step Into Cuba program, a nationally recognized model, is under study by the University of New Mexico Prevention Research Center (PRC). This fact sheet, one of a series of five, shares initial findings for New Mexico community use.

Recommendation from the Community Guide: Build, strengthen, and maintain social networks that support increases in physical activity.

New social networks can be created or existing networks in social settings outside the family, such as the workplace, can be used.

Typically, participants set up a buddy system and make contracts committing that both buddies will be active, or they form walking groups or other active groups to provide companionship and support while being physically active.

Evidence: Results from a Systematic Review by the Task Force

Research shows that social support...

- Increases time spent in activity by approximately 44%.
- Increases frequency of exercise by approximately 20%.
- Increases aerobic capacity by approximately 5%.
- Improves fitness levels, lowers percentage of body fat, increases knowledge about exercise, and improves confidence in the ability to exercise.

Applicability

These findings should be generally applicable for people of all ages and levels of activity, and in diverse settings, if the programs are adapted to the people participating in them.



Community Campaign

Access to Places

Individually Adapted

Street Scale Design

Social Support

More Information

stepintocuba.org

hsc.unm.edu/som/prc/

thecommunityguide.org

Cuba Strategy

The rural community of Cuba, New Mexico, was able to implement the national recommendations for increasing physical activity through social support with the following strategies:

- Local walking champion
- Independent funding obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) through the New Mexico Department of Health
- Full-time position healthy communities coordinator

Specific Cuba Approaches

❖Walking Groups

The walking champion organizes, leads, and empowers walking groups and promotes group activity as part of the community campaign.

❖Identifying Potential Groups

The walking champion has found particular groups to be most receptive to walking together: Cuba Senior Center “regulars,” employee groups (e.g., school staff, clinic staff, governmental office staffs), and student participants of a summer fitness camp organized by the champion.

❖Planning for Alternate Activities

Physical activities other than walking are substituted when walking is not possible due to inclement weather. For example the walking group from the local senior center will participate in indoor games, yoga, and other activities when walking outside is impractical.

Quotes from the Community

“When you see people out walking and stopping and talking...we have an increased sense of community...an increased knowledge.”

“... it is starting with individuals and building up momentum and spreading to become social change in the community.”

“When I first started, there weren’t many, but now ... there are a lot of people who walk, both men and women ... it just helps to see people walking all the time.”

“...People are walking because of the atmosphere ...it is changing... people give other people incentive...”

