

# Improving Hospital Physical Activity Environments

**The CDC supports making the healthy choice the easy choice in every community setting.**

As major employers and health leaders, hospitals can help establish strong community norms for promoting healthy and active living through nutritious food and beverage, opportunities for physical activity, support for breastfeeding, and tobacco-free environments. This P2P Series presents case studies of hospitals improving their environment to better support the health of their employees and embody the mission of their organization.

## IN THIS ISSUE...

*Piedmont Hospital and Denver Health share how their environment makes it easier for employees to be physically active every day.*

## Worksite Workouts

One of the first things new employees of **Piedmont Hospital** learn during orientation is the hospital's commitment to employee health. The most obvious sign of that commitment is the 25,000 square foot health and fitness center located inside the hospital, which offers cardio and strength training equipment, lap and therapy pools and locker rooms with showers. Members have access to several aerobics classes, personal exercise consultations and free parking. The initiation fee is waived for staff who join in the first month of employment. "We also have a 47% membership discount for hospital employees so they can join at almost half the rate of a public membership," says Jennifer Hopper, Manager of the Health and Fitness Center.

Although the fitness center has been around for years, it was not always as state-of-the-art as it is today. Before the center was built, a few hospital staff were using an auditorium for informal exercise classes and stair-running. That illustrated the need for a more structured place for group physical activity. More than 20 years later, the space has been completely renovated and redesigned. Hopper credits supportive leadership. "You certainly need the executive team on your side and to keep giving them reasons to celebrate your existence," Hopper says. Keeping leaders engaged and up-to-date with accomplishments can help in times of budget cuts. Using employee newsletters and memos to highlight participation rates, behavior changes and competition results is one way to demonstrate the success of programs and keep wellness on the radar.

The physical activity culture at Piedmont goes beyond the fitness center. Mapped walking routes inside and outside the hospital create a walkable environment and promote fitness. One indoor path includes a tunnel between medical buildings that goes under busy, multi-lane Peachtree Road, which is much safer for pedestrians. Outdoor routes wind through nearby neighborhoods and create another way for Piedmont to do its part to support active living.

## Key Considerations

- *Improving safety can promote physical activity by allowing people to feel more secure.*
- *Highlighting employee health accomplishments with leaders from all departments can reinforce a hospitalwide culture of health.*

# Mileage in the Mile High City

**Denver Health and Hospital Authority** is one of only a handful of hospitals in the United States attached to a public health department. This public “urban safety net” healthcare system lends itself to providing both preventive and acute healthcare services and supports relationships between clinical and public health professionals and partnerships within the Denver community. When the opportunity arose to be part of the larger bike share program coming to the city, Denver Health jumped at the chance. The B-Cycle program, fully implemented in 2010, is a system of public-use bicycles that can be checked in and out from 50 stations throughout the city. The red bikes are intended to get people out of their cars and promote active transportation.

Denver Health was involved with this program from the beginning and houses one of the stations. Eileen Duin, Tracey Richers Maruyama and Jennifer Wieczorek of Denver Health discuss why it was important for the hospital to be part of this project. “Knowing a bike share program was coming to Denver and having a mission to promote health, we wanted to be involved with where stations would be located, so that as the program grows we can ensure it is reaching the populations who are transportation-limited and it is in the neighborhoods that need it most, says Wieczorek. She goes on to say, “It certainly sets the example that we’re a hospital that promotes health and wellness and part of that is using bikes and active modes of transportation. Employees use it to get around. It’s quite convenient to check out a bike at Denver Health and ride it to meetings downtown.”

The hospital engaged its legal department to make sure hosting a station on their property was possible and found the responsibilities were simple. It turns out, they were also worthwhile. In 2010, the Denver Health bike station had 2,652 rides with 5,648.8 miles biked. At average biking speeds, that equals 43,452 minutes (724.2 hours) of physical activity. In addition to obvious increases in physical activity and associated health, Wieczorek says involvement in the program has boosted the hospital’s image by supporting the bike culture in Denver.



## Key Considerations

- *Strong relationships with local public works and community-development departments can help make new initiatives a success more quickly.*
- *Being involved in a local initiative shows support and can enhance the reputation of a hospital system as a community partner.*
- *Promoting active transportation on a hospital campus can have benefits beyond health: parking relief, less carbon emissions and better options for employees who are transportation-limited.*



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