



introduction

Foreword

In 2001 the State of Alaska Cardiovascular Health Program was awarded a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to decrease cardiovascular disease in Alaska. One of the first tasks for the new program was to assess the present status of the state in terms of cardiovascular and cerebrovascular disease (stroke) and the risk factors that contribute to the underlying causes of these chronic illnesses.

Risk factors are characteristics that increase the likelihood of developing disease; some can be changed, and some cannot. Modifiable risk factors for cardiovascular disease include high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, diabetes, smoking, obesity, and physical inactivity.¹ The role of physical inactivity as a risk factor for cardiovascular and cerebrovascular disease is of particular interest, as the research shows that physically inactive people are almost twice as likely to develop heart disease as persons who engage in regular physical activity.²

Physical activity, defined as any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that expends energy, includes a broad range of occupational, leisure-time, and routine daily activities.³ To reap the health benefits of physical activity, it is recommended that activities be performed on all or most days of the week for a total of thirty minutes per day, with at least moderate intensity, the energy equal to, for example, that a healthy individual might expend while walking briskly, mowing the lawn, swimming, or bicycling on level terrain.³

Data from the 2000 Behavioral Risk Factors Surveillance System (BRFSS) data shows that 68.5% of Alaskan adults do not get the recommended amount of physical activity. To reverse this trend, Alaskans need help. They need policies that support active lifestyles, a wide variety of activity programs, and places to be active.

This report presents a snapshot of how state, regional, and local agencies are working to increase physical activity levels of Alaskans. It shows that while many things are already being done, gaps do exist. This physical activity inventory provides data about current physical activity promotion efforts; the information can help combine duplicated efforts and encourage new efforts that address the highlighted gaps.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to create an inventory of current physical activity-related policies, sustainable programs, and accessible environmental supports that would help guide future physical



activity promotion efforts in Alaska. With this information, agencies around the state can begin to address inactivity and hopefully decrease rates of heart disease, obesity, diabetes, cancer, and many other unhealthy conditions.

Scope

This inventory covers policies, programs, and environmental supports for physical activity in Alaskan governments, non-government service agencies, schools, worksites, and healthcare sites. It documents statewide, regional, and local efforts in those settings. Information about nutrition was collected from both schools and worksites. Cardiovascular risk factor screening information was gathered from healthcare sites. This project did not attempt to collect information pertaining to individual physical activity levels and activities, nor did it attempt to catalogue all physical activity related facilities or activities of local sport and recreation organizations.