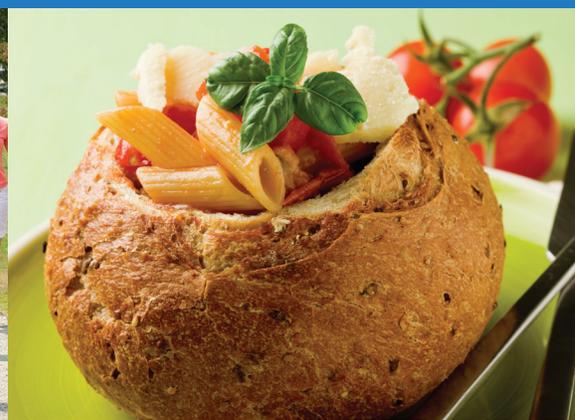


PARTNERSHIPS TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY HEALTH (PICH) PROGRAM

# Interfaith Active Living Initiative

## Quick Reference Guide

*Social Support for Physical Activity:  
Establishing a Community-Based Walking Group Program  
to Increase Physical Activity Among Youth and Adults*



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# Overview

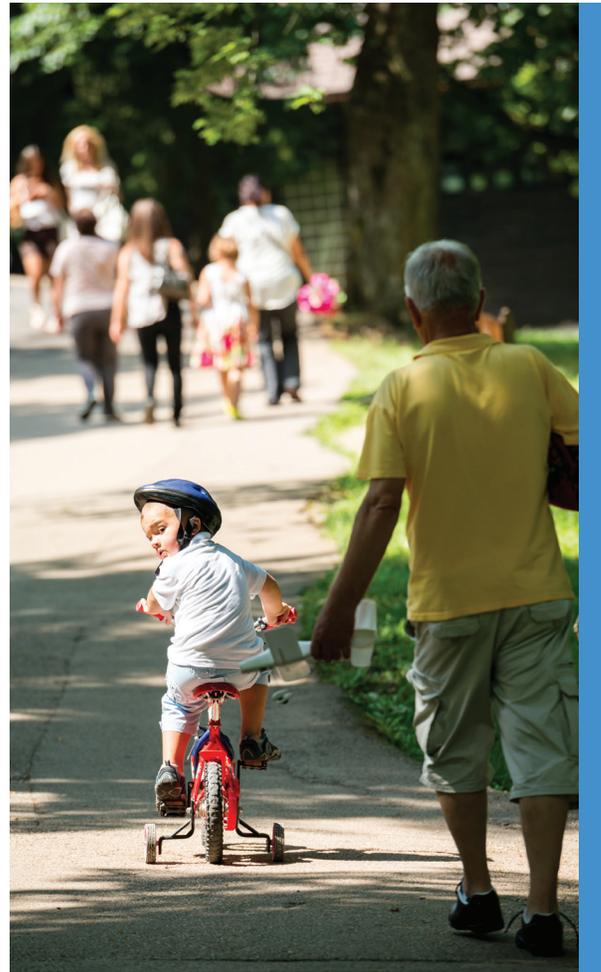
## THE EVIDENCE

Research has shown that social support can influence an individual's overall health and well-being. It points to the social networks and relationships in social settings outside of the family that provide help in coping, managing stress, and changing behaviors such as increasing physical activity. These social networks, newly created or preexisting, help promote group closeness and bonding between members. Social support can be in the form of providing direct assistance, sharing knowledge about resources, demonstrating concern, encouragement, or affection, or simply give feedback.

Experts recommend that programs that build, strengthen, or maintain social support be adapted in community settings to increase physical activity. The Fulton County Department of Health and Wellness Partnerships to Improve Community Health (PICH) Program is committed to increasing physical activity among members of interfaith organizations and their community.

## THE APPROACH

This Quick Reference Guide focuses on assisting local interfaith groups in increasing physical activity among young people and adults by establishing a community-based walking group program to increase social support of individuals wanting to improve their health and activity habits.



## EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Interfaith organizations and their communities that successfully establish one or more walking group programs can expect to see the following results:

- The companionship, support, and encouragement offered to participants through these networks will lead to increased knowledge about physical activity and confidence in the ability to exercise.
- Length and frequency of physical activity will increase, and overall physical fitness will improve for men and women, people of all ages, and both sedentary and previously active individuals.

SECTION **1**

# Your Role

As an interfaith organization, your role in building, strengthening, and maintaining social support for physical activity will depend on the needs of your congregation and community and the resources and capacity you have to establish a community-based walking group program. Setting up and sustaining an effective walking group program requires thorough planning and organization. Therefore, one option for you to consider is to facilitate program planning and coordinate program activities. The role of the wellness coordinator is the focus of this Quick Reference Guide.

**TABLE 1: Personnel and Duties**

**WELLNESS COORDINATOR**

- Coordinates daily, weekly and monthly activities
- Helps to assemble the core team
- Organizes and facilitates training of assistants or volunteers
- Develops materials for program promotion
- Develops and maintains e-mail communications and text-based formats
- Selects, maps, and measures routes with help from assistant walking leaders and others
- Participate in program kick-off and other events
- Decide how issues should be addressed as they arise
- Provide and welcome feedback to facilitate the ongoing program success
- Attend trainings
- Facilitate walks
- Record attendance at all program related activities
- Safely lead participants through warm-up and cool down exercises
- Meet regularly with PICH program coordinator or staff for support and progress reports
- Organize other events in addition to regularly scheduled walking sessions
- Provide social support and check on participants regularly
- Assist with program evaluation
- Develops program goals and timeline
- Plans program activities and promotional campaign
- Contribute to community development and improvements activities

SECTION 2

# Implementing the Approach

Table 2 summarizes the action steps that are recommended for successfully establishing a walking group program in your interfaith organization and community. The numbering of action steps is meant only to suggest an order of activity you might consider; in practice, there is no exact order to the steps—many steps will likely occur simultaneously or may occur in a sequence different from what appears in this Quick Reference Guide. In addition, the timeline for completing each step is highly dependent on an interfaith organization’s particular circumstances. Use this Quick Reference Guide to inform and direct your activities, making sure to seek additional technical assistance with your efforts and realizing that you will need to determine how these steps best fit your community.

**TABLE 2: Action Steps for Establishing a Community-Based Walking Group Program to Increase Physical Activity Among Youth and Adults**

GETTING STARTED
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action Step 1— Assess your interfaith organization to determine the fit of your potential walking group program within current interfaith activities.</li> <li>• Action Step 2—Engage ministry leader and congregations by informing them about your plans to develop a walking group program and educate them about its benefits.</li> <li>• Action Step 3— Bring together committed congregants in the form of a core team to participate in the walking group program.</li> <li>• Action Step 4— Recruit an additional walking leader or volunteer to assist and support with the walking group.</li> <li>• Action Step 5— Work with your core team to establish goals for participation and total number of activities.</li> <li>• Action Step 6— Train walking leader or volunteer.</li> <li>• Action Step 7— Select, map, and measure potential walking routes in your community with help from walking leader or volunteer.</li> </ul>
MOVING FORWARD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action Step 8 — Collaborate with your core team and walking leader or volunteer to review and refine your program activities.</li> <li>• Action Step 9 — Review toolkit provided.</li> <li>• Action Step 10— Publicize the walking group program throughout the interfaith organization and community to raise awareness and attract participants.</li> <li>• Action Step 11— Participate in the kick-off event and other physical activity events throughout Fulton County.</li> <li>• <b>Action Step 12 — After walking groups begin meeting, encourage walking leader or volunteer to focus on maximizing social support for physical activity among participants and to be creative in maintaining each group’s interest.</b></li> </ul>
LOOKING BEYOND
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action Step 13— Organize other relevant social activities in addition to regularly scheduled walking sessions.</li> <li>• Action Step 14— Create or maintain an active link between walking groups and other activities in your community to increase program visibility and to ensure that participants feel connected to a bigger movement.</li> <li>• Action Step 15— Provide ongoing support to walking leader or volunteer and continue working with them to improve program performance.</li> <li>• Action Step 16— Work with your core team in applying walking group program experience to overall community development and improvement activities.</li> </ul>

Engage other potential stakeholders by informing them about your plans to develop a walking group program and educate them about its benefits. For examples, see Table 3 below.

**TABLE 3:** Stakeholders’ Related Interests and Their Possible Roles as Partners

STAKEHOLDERS	RELATED INTEREST	ROLES AS A PARTNER
<b>COMMUNITY RESIDENTS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased opportunities for physical activity that are at convenient times and locations</li> <li>Increased social support for physical activity</li> <li>Better health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participate in walking groups, including as walking leaders</li> <li>Help promote the program</li> <li>Advocate improvements in walkability</li> </ul>
<b>NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased opportunities for positive engagement of neighborhood residents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Notify members of program opportunities</li> <li>Suggest neighborhood walking routes and provide maps of routes</li> </ul>
<b>COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, HEALTH PROGRAMS, SCHOOLS, AND FAITH-BASED INSTITUTIONS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased opportunities for physical activity</li> <li>Increased opportunities for positive engagement of community residents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide access to a wide base of community residents</li> <li>Provide meeting locations and structure for individual walking groups</li> <li>Donate supplies or materials (e.g., refreshments)</li> <li>Coordinate walking group logistics</li> </ul>
<b>PEDESTRIAN AND OTHER ADVOCACY GROUPS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased opportunities for physical activity</li> <li>Creation and preservation of safe walking environments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build program support through promotion</li> <li>Assist with determining walkability of community routes</li> </ul>
<b>COMMUNITY LEADERS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community health promotion</li> <li>Recognition for role in supporting the program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide resources to support the program</li> <li>Help to promote the program</li> </ul>
<b>EMPLOYERS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved employee health and productivity resulting from regular physical activity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote the program and provide incentives to employees participating in walking groups</li> </ul>
<b>LOCAL BUSINESSES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong community relationships</li> <li>Promotion of products and services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contribute donations to support program (e.g., incentive items such as coupons and t-shirts)</li> <li>Sponsor community walking events</li> </ul>
<b>LOCAL MEDIA (TELEVISION, RADIO, NEWSPAPER, INTERNET)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>News coverage of local issues</li> <li>Public service announcements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inform the public about the walking group program and promote its use</li> </ul>

**TABLE 3:** *contd.*

<b>HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved patient health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refer patients who are overweight or at risk for cardiovascular disease to the program</li> <li>Donate walking supplies (e.g., heart rate monitors, pedometers)</li> </ul>
<b>LOCAL AND STATE HEALTH DEPARTMENTS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved public health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide resources and leadership</li> <li>Contribute data on benefits of physical activity</li> </ul>
<b>GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS CONCERNED WITH PARKS, RECREATION, AND TRANSPORTATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recreational opportunities for community residents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide maps of viable community walking routes</li> <li>Ensure that routes are safe and well maintained</li> </ul>
<b>LAW ENFORCEMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Safety and protection of community residents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer guidance on safe routes in community</li> <li>Ensure safety of routes</li> </ul>

After you have identified stakeholders in your interfaith organization and community, determine the best way to educate these individuals and groups about your plans. Invite them to an informational session about the walking group program you are establishing. Also consider offering information at health fairs and events about the positive effects of social support for increasing physical activity and how a community-based walking group approach can benefit the community. Continue to communicate these benefits throughout your ongoing activities.

For further details on implementation, please refer to your complete action guide **Social Support for Physical Activity: Establishing a Community-Based Walking Group Program to Increase Physical Activity Among Youth and Adults.**