



## New Hampshire Municipal Survey, 2011

### Assessment of Municipal Policies

#### Background

Policy changes have become the center of attention for many public health programs including obesity prevention. In July 2009, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released Recommended Community Strategies and Measurements to Prevent Obesity in the United States, commonly referred to as the Measures Project. It identified and recommended strategies, and related measures, that allow towns and cities to support and promote healthy food and physical activity environments (1). The strategies describe how cities and towns can promote the availability of affordable healthy food and beverages, support healthy food and beverage choices, encourage breastfeeding, create safe communities that support physical activity, and encourage communities to organize for change.

In 2011, the New Hampshire Obesity Prevention Program (NH OPP), in collaboration with the New Hampshire Association of Regional Planning Commissions (NH ARPC), created and distributed a cross-sectional survey designed to determine a New Hampshire baseline of municipal policies as they relate to the Measures Project. The project goal was to assess existing nutrition and physical activity policies in all 234 New Hampshire municipalities. The results of this assessment will be used for future planning and progress monitoring. This report describes the project and its main findings.

#### Methods

During 2010, the NH OPP identified strategies from the Measures Project best suited for the baseline assessment and progress monitoring at the municipal level. Of the 24 recommended measures defined by the CDC, the NH OPP selected the standards that focused on the promotion and support of healthy food and beverage choices, support of physical activity, and breastfeeding. Because the intended survey respondents were municipal representatives, and to keep the survey reasonably short, any policies related to schools and school environment were excluded. The survey instrument was designed to adhere to the original proposed language of the Measures Project. Representatives of each of the nine New Hampshire Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) were asked to provide input with regards to the survey questions. The RPCs also distributed the survey to their municipal contacts throughout the State.

The survey was disseminated electronically using the online survey tool Survey Monkey®. Data collection took place from March to December of 2011. Two reminders were sent electronically and each town and city that did not respond was contacted again by phone. The NH OPP was provided support by an intern from the Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Program, who made many of the calls to cities and towns. Municipal representatives also received a printed copy of the survey and could choose to fax or mail their responses to the NH OPP instead of using Survey Monkey, if a paper survey was easier for

them to use. Data were analyzed using the SAS® software (version 9.2, SAS Institute, Inc, Cary, North Carolina). Additional information on the total population and acres of land for each town and city was provided by the RPCs.

## Results

Out of 234 municipalities, 137 responded to the survey, representing 59% of all municipalities, 53% of total acres of land, and 73% of total New Hampshire population. Not all respondents completed the full questionnaire. Table 1 represents the number and proportion of responding municipalities that reported existing standards and existing policies.

**Table 1. Municipalities with existing standards and policies**

<i>Standards/Policies Related to Physical Activity*</i>	<i>n/%</i>
Designated shared-use paths and bike lanes (N = 121)	26/22%
Areas zoned for mixed-use development (N = 112)	44/39%
Existing sidewalks (N = 123)	64/52%
Existing policies for prompt clearing of snow from sidewalks (N = 64)	39/61%
Building sidewalks and bike lanes (N = 119)	20/17%
Partnerships that address healthy eating/active living (N = 113)	21/19%
<i>Standards/Policies Related to Nutrition*</i>	
Nutrition standards (N = 117)	0/0%
Prohibiting advertisement of less healthy food and beverages (N = 115)	0/0%
Prohibiting sale of less healthy food and beverages (N = 116)	0/0%
Limiting or reducing portion sizes (N = 116)	0/0%
Reducing cost of healthier foods and beverages (N = 116)	0/0%
Existing medium/large grocery store (N = 109)	40/37%
Community gardens (N = 113)	33/29%
Encouraging local agriculture (N = 113)	38/34%
Providing time and space for breastfeeding (N = 114)	5/4%

\* "I do not know" responses were included in the totals (denominators)

Approximately one half of the municipalities reported having sidewalks and more than one third reported having areas for mixed-use development. Twenty-two percent of municipalities reported having designated shared-use paths and bike lanes. More than one third reported existing medium to large grocery stores and having policies encouraging local agriculture. None of the municipalities currently have nutrition standards or policies related to sales and advertisement of unhealthy food choices or policies encouraging healthy eating habits.

Altogether, 97 municipalities reported 5,724 miles of paved streets and 20 municipalities reported 211 miles of shared-use paths and bike lanes. In total, only 4% of the reported paved roads have bike lanes. A total of 47 municipalities reported 1,347 miles of sidewalks (24% of reported paved streets have sidewalks), 23 municipalities reported 66,338 acres of zoned land for mixed-use development (2.5% of total zoned acres of land of all reporting municipalities). In addition, 33 municipalities reported having 83 community gardens (1.5 per 10,000 residents), 57 municipalities reported 100 farmers’ markets (1.6 per 10,000 residents) and 40 reported 108 medium to large grocery stores (1.7 medium to large grocery stores per 10,000 residents).

Twenty-one municipalities reported existing partnerships that address physical activity and/or healthy eating. Some of the identified partners or coalitions included the Local Government Center, local businesses, local Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL) coalitions, and Parks and Recreation Programs.

When asked about outdoor recreational facilities, most of the responding municipalities reported walking, hiking, snowshoeing and cross-country trails, open play fields, community playgrounds, and parks. Table 2 presents the number and proportion of municipalities reporting various recreational facilities.

**Table 2. Number of municipalities reporting recreational facilities**

<i>Reported Recreational Facilities*</i>	<i>1-10 facilities (n/%)</i>	<i>More than 10 facilities (n/%)</i>	<i>No facilities (n/%)</i>
Walking, hiking (N = 111)	73/66%	22/20%	16/14%
Snow showing, cross-country trails (N = 106)	57/54%	17/16%	27/26%
Bicycle trails (N = 103)	44/43%	4/5%	50/49%
Open play fields (N = 113)	89/79%	9/8%	14/12%
Public pools (N = 106)	24/23%	0/0%	82/77%
Community playgrounds and parks (N = 112)	87/78%	7/6%	18/16%

\* “I do not know” responses were included in the totals (denominators)

Forty-one out of 113 (36%) respondents reported “other” recreational facilities in their towns or cities. such as skateboard parks, public beaches, community centers, ski slopes, and ice-skating rinks.

## Conclusion

The *New Hampshire Municipal Survey* collected baseline information on existing municipal policies that support healthy eating and active living. Despite the partnership between the NH OPP and the RPCs, and the additional support from the Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Program, only 59% of municipalities responded. Nevertheless, because 73% of New Hampshire's population lives in the responding municipalities, the findings are useful for future planning and evaluation. The Measures Project promotes sidewalks and shared-use paths as important sources of daily physical activity. The Measures Project also reported a significant association between bicycling infrastructure and frequency of bicycling for recreation and for commuting. The NH Municipal Survey data show that a majority of New Hampshire municipalities reported having walking, hiking, and shared-use paths. Approximately 24% of paved streets have sidewalks and 4% of paved streets contain bike lanes.

It is worth noting that no municipalities reported nutrition standards or policies related to healthy eating; however, 4% of responding municipalities have a policy supporting breastfeeding. Municipal nutrition policies such as healthy food zone ordinances, municipal building healthy vending standards, and policies about foods served at municipal meetings are examples of policies being implemented across the nation.

In New Hampshire a state Food Systems Council has formed and is developing a plan to end childhood hunger. Additionally the Upper Valley Lake Sunapee RPC has undertaken a regional Food Source Mapping project and the Children's Alliance of New Hampshire commissioned the Carsey Institute to map food insecurity and food sources in NH cities and towns.<sup>2</sup>

New federal labor rules require certain employers to provide accommodations for nursing mothers, including reasonable break time and a private space to pump breast milk at the worksite. It is reasonable to expect that breastfeeding policies will increase over time as these federal rules are implemented.

## References

- 1) Keener D., Goodman K., Lowry A., et al. (2009). Recommended community strategies and measurements to prevent obesity in the United States: Implementation and measurement guide. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- 2) Wauchope B., Ward S.K. (2012). Mapping food insecurity and food sources in New Hampshire cities and towns. Durham, NH: Carsey Institute, University of New Hampshire. Accessed on 6/20/2012 at <http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/publications/IB-Wauchope-CAofNH-NH-Food-Insecurity.pdf>.