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Communities Promoting Active Living¹

The obesity epidemic sweeping the US is directly related to too much food and too little physical activity. American neighborhoods, cities and workplaces are structured to minimize physical activity.

Being obese carries more risk than smoking. About one third of smokers die prematurely; about one third of cancers are nutritionally related; about one third of obese individuals will develop type 2 diabetes, and being overweight is a significant risk factor for heart disease.

One preventive measure is physical activity, as simple as walking, for the equivalent of 30 minutes daily. Yet most neighborhoods built in the US after World War II were designed for car travel. Walking or riding a bike to shop or work is inconvenient and unsafe. Many communities are working to reverse this decline in physical activity by encouraging walking, biking and other exercise.

To encourage this movement, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation will be awarding 25 communities \$200,000 grants over five years to encourage active living. The grants are part of the foundation's \$16 million Active Living By Design program at the University of North Carolina School of Public Health. Nearly 900 communities have applied for these funds.

IAF President Clem Bezold serves on the program's National Advisory Committee charged with choosing the communities. After taking part in the first round of judging, Bezold said "it is clear that a diverse set of communities, from recent suburbs to New England mill towns (ironically designed for a time when walking was the normal mode of transportation), to new immigrant communities are making exciting progress in enabling and reinforcing greater physical activity." A large number of communities are likely to pursue their ideas with their own resources if they do not receive a grant.

For more information about this active living initiative, see <http://www.activelivingbydesign.org:9005/about/>

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