What are Healthiest Practice Open Streets programs?
‘Open Streets’ programs temporarily open selected streets to people by closing them to cars. By doing this, the streets become places where people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds can come out and improve their health.

With well-planned routes, health-focused activity hubs, and frequently occurring program dates Open Streets programs have the power to change a city’s culture of health. We call this kind of Open Streets program ‘Healthiest Practice Open Streets’. By participating in Healthiest Practice Open Streets regularly, people can begin to change their habits and a city can change its culture of health.

This fact sheet is part of a series to promote the benefits of Healthiest Practice Open Streets programs. Find them all at www.healthiestpracticeopenstreets.org

Building Community by Opening the Streets
Open Streets initiatives are typically recognized for creating a fun and inviting outdoor environment for physical activity. A less commonly acknowledged benefit is the social one—when implemented regularly, these programs can enrich the social fabric of communities and enhance quality of life for participants.

Participants who may not frequently travel in their neighborhood on foot or by bike have the chance to engage in physical activity without safety concerns while also mingling with neighbors and friends. Open Streets programs can facilitate increased interactions among neighbors, which can strengthen community cohesion and improve well-being. Open Streets programs can also develop social cohesion by improving safety and perceptions of safety, both important factors when encouraging individuals to engage in more physical activity in their neighborhood parks or walkways.

Necessary Considerations
Open Streets programs present an opportunity to impact mental health and well-being by enabling social interaction. Programs that are regularly implemented can best support communities by keeping in mind the following key considerations:

Intentionally plan routes through diverse neighborhoods in order to link communities and engage a variety of populations.

This creates opportunities for a culturally and economically diverse array of community members, young and old, to enjoy their own streets and to venture into other neighborhoods. Routing through diverse communities also creates easy access to programming for those individuals who may be most at risk for chronic health conditions, and are also most likely to experience health inequities and limited access to health, financial, and physical activity promoting resources.

Engage in effective and culturally appropriate outreach so that residents know that these programs are designed for everyone.

Some communities experiencing changes as a result of gentrification may be less inclined to participate in an Open Streets program if they believe it is “exclusive” or intended for another population. Promoting the program to underrepresented communities, through both trusted partners and culturally-specific media, is a way to ensure program inclusiveness and diverse program participation.

Social Impacts: By the Numbers

- 89% of respondents in St. Louis, MO said Open Streets programs positively impacted their feelings for their city.
- 91% of respondents in St. Louis also felt very safe along their route.
- 15% of respondents in Chicago, IL chose social networking as their favorite part about Open Streets.
- 26.4% of respondents in Fort Collins, CO came to Open Streets to build community.

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Citations


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