



Arizona Physical Activity 2024 Landscape Analysis

ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES
STATE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND NUTRITION PROGRAM

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Arizona Department of Health Services' (ADHS) State Physical Activity and Nutrition (SPAN) program operates at the state level to implement policies and activities that connect activity-friendly routes to everyday destinations. This, in turn, can help to improve health behaviors and outcomes by focusing on equitable access to physical activity and promoting community design strategies aligned with CDC guidelines. This landscape analysis provides a statewide overview of Arizona physical activity supports and partnerships, and explores underserved communities for targeted interventions. Key findings include:

- 🔍 There were substantial disparities across Arizona counties in terms of physical activity behaviors, support, infrastructure, and available programs. While counties such as Maricopa and Gila showed higher investment in transportation alternatives and safety initiatives, other counties like Greenlee, Santa Cruz, and La Paz had minimal projects supporting active transportation.
- 🔍 Residents in rural counties faced higher levels of physical inactivity, lower rates of active transportation, and greater transportation barriers. Rural areas were more susceptible to limited access to infrastructure that supports active living, such as sidewalks, bike lanes, and public transit. These disparities restrict opportunities for physical activity, potentially worsening health inequities in these communities.
- 🔍 Arizona has not yet adopted a statewide Complete Streets or Safe Routes to School policy, which may help address infrastructure gaps and the number of available forms of active transportation. Without such policies in place, many areas lacked the necessary frameworks to create sustainable active living programs.
- 🔍 Interview findings highlighted several shared obstacles, such as funding constraints, limited organizational capacity, and barriers to collaboration. There was a particular need for technical assistance, community level support, and strengthening of partnerships.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Focus efforts on underserved and rural areas** to ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities for increased active transportation projects.
2. **Support the development of active transportation policies**, including any statewide initiatives, to increase and enhance policy, systems, and environmental, change for community design.
3. **Increase technical assistance and capacity-building support** by developing user-friendly toolkits and resources for local programs to implement and maintain active living programs.
4. **Strengthen and expand partnerships** with local governments, city departments, and community organizations to increase collaboration and coordination between agencies supporting active living.

Landscape Overview and Goals

In 2023, the ADHS received funding to implement the CDC's Physical Activity strategy across statewide policies and initiatives. As part of their five-year SPAN program, ADHS is focused on promoting and increasing access to physical activity through community design.

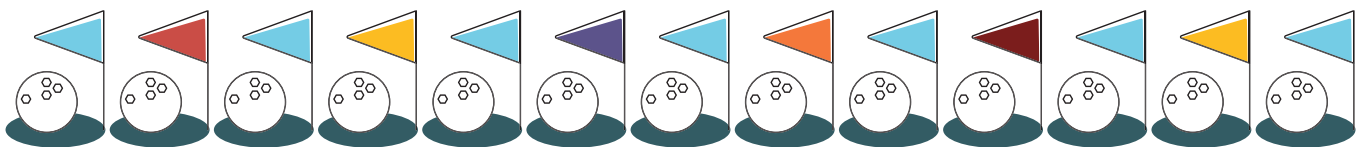
The [Physical Activity](#) strategy is part of an initiative developed by the CDC aimed at increasing physical activity by creating activity-friendly routes to everyday destinations. This approach involves community design and prevention strategies that make walking, biking, and other physical activities easier and safer. The strategy focuses on integrating physical activity into daily routines through infrastructure improvements such as sidewalks, bike lanes, public transit, and access to recreational spaces. These community-level interventions promote health equity by ensuring that all residents, including those in underserved areas, have access to safe and accessible environments for physical activity.

The strategy aligns with the [Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans](#) by encouraging communities to design spaces that make it easier for people to meet recommended activity levels. It emphasizes integrating physical activity into daily life, which helps prevent chronic diseases and supports overall health.

Landscape Analysis Goals

The purpose of this 2024 landscape analysis is to assess physical activity initiatives across Arizona, with a focus on better understanding health disparities and how to promote equitable access to physical activity resources. The primary goals include:

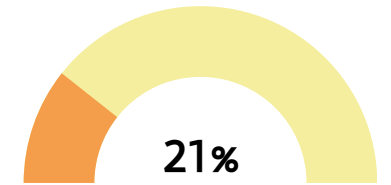
1. Providing a statewide overview of the current physical activity supports, initiatives, and partnerships.
2. Identifying 1-2 Arizona communities currently underserved and experiencing health inequity that would benefit from completing the [Active Communities Tool](#).



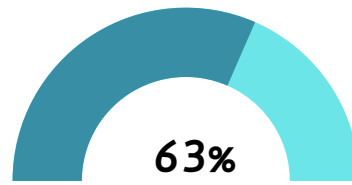
A Snapshot of Physical Activity in Arizona

Source: [CDC DNPAO Data, Trends and Maps](#).

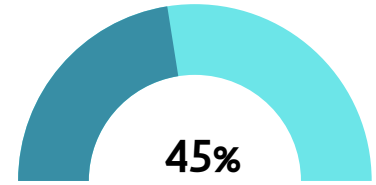
Behaviors



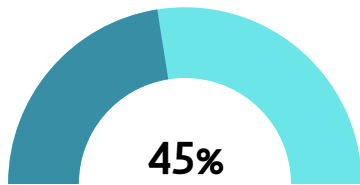
of adults engaged in no leisure time physical activity in 2023 (n=12,000)



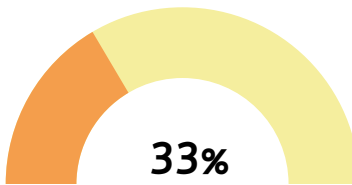
of adults were aerobically active for 150 minutes a week in 2023 (n=10,476)



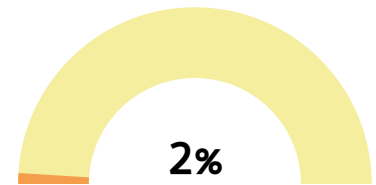
of adults were aerobically active for 300 minutes a week in 2023 (n=9,824)



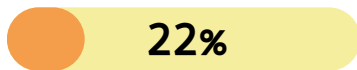
of adults met muscle strengthening guidelines in 2023 (n=11,580)



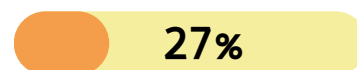
of adults met aerobic and muscle strengthening guidelines in 2023 (n=10,140)



of adults usually walked or biked to work, in 2022

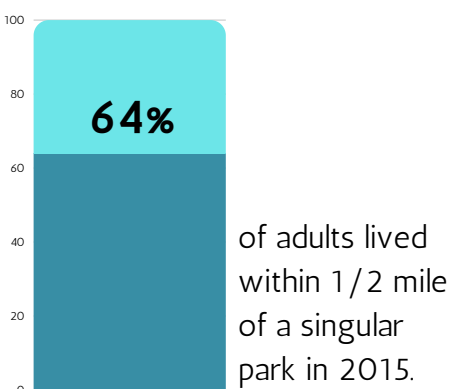
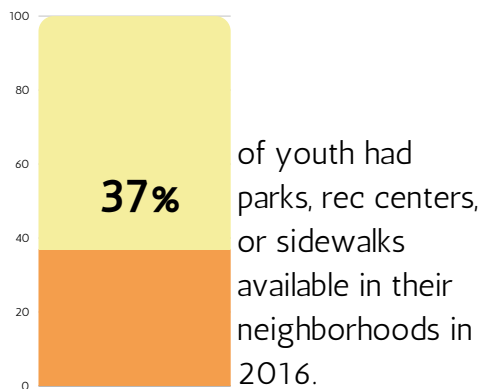


of adolescents were physically active daily in 2021 (n=1,140)



of adolescents participated in daily physical education in 2021 (n=1,136)

Policy, Systems, and Environmental Supports



Arizona has **NOT** adopted some form of Complete Streets policy.

Arizona does **NOT** require physical activity in preschools.

Arizona faces notable deficiencies in residents' reported physical activity behaviors. While many Arizonans may have met guidelines in other areas (aerobically active for 150 minutes, and meeting muscle strength guidelines), there is still a clear need for overall improvement. Additionally, Arizona lacks a [Complete Streets Policy](#), which could be instrumental in increasing both access to and engagement in physical activity. Focusing on implementing such policies and enhancing physical activity opportunities may be important to addressing these limitations.

Physical Activity By County

Figure 1. In 2022, the estimated prevalence of **physical inactivity** among adults aged 18 years and older was highest in Apache, La Paz, Mohave, and Yuma Counties.

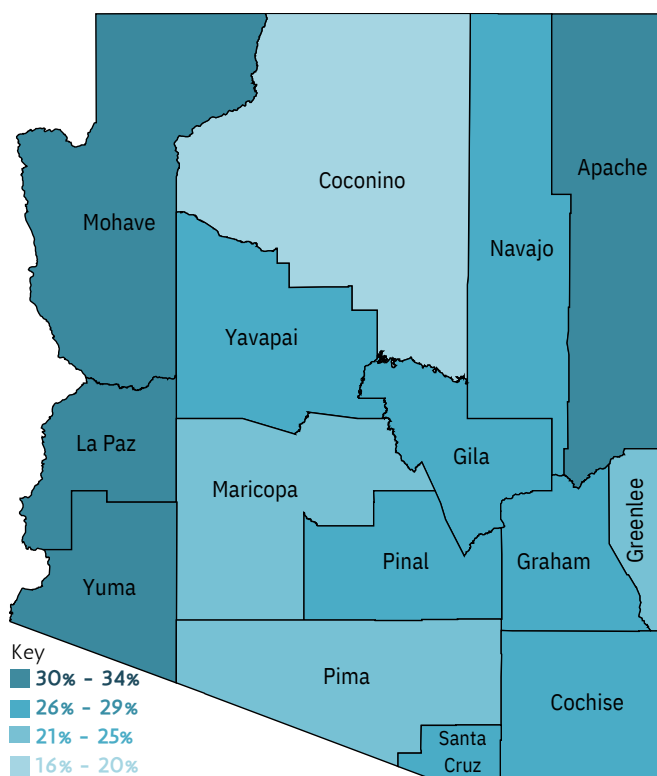
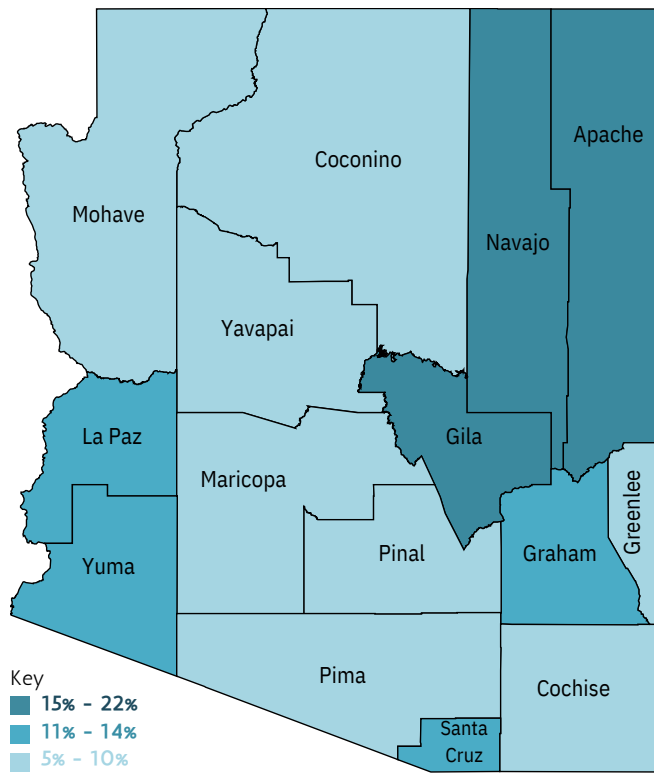


Figure 2. In 2022, the estimated prevalence of **lack of reliable transportation in the past 12 months among adults** ages 18 years and older was highest in Apache, Navajo, and Gila Counties.



Data Source: [PLACES: Local Data for Better Health](#).

The figures above revealed substantial disparities in physical activity and transportation access across Arizona counties. Many of Arizona's more rural, tribal-serving, and border counties (Apache, Navajo, Gila, La Paz, Yuma, Graham, and Santa Cruz) had higher rates of inactivity and a lack of reliable transportation. This issue was most evident in Apache County, where 21.5% of adults lacked transportation, overlapping with high inactivity rates (33.4%). Similarly, data from counties like Navajo, Santa Cruz, Graham, and Gila suggested a link between transportation barriers and the ability to engage in physical activity. Targeted interventions aimed at improving transportation access and promoting physical activity could help reduce disparities, focusing on Arizona's most underserved counties and those experiencing higher inequities.

Arizona Commuting Characteristics

Source: [The United States Census American Community Survey \(ACS\)](#).

Figure 3. In 2023, Yuma reported the lowest rates **for walking and biking**, Maricopa and Mohave had low walking rates, and Apache and Cochise had low biking rates. Data were only available for 10 of Arizona's 15 counties.

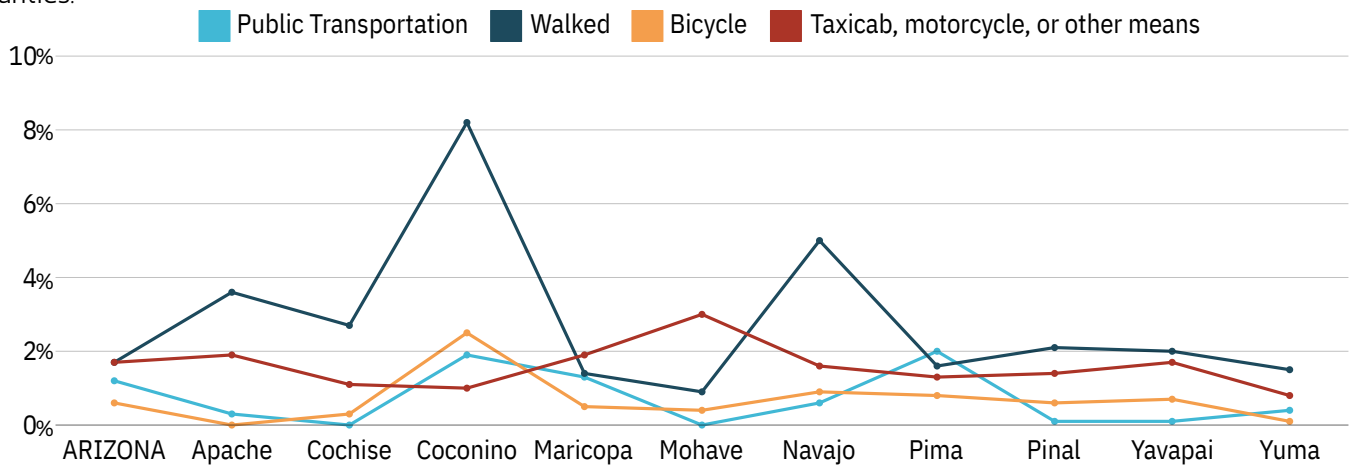
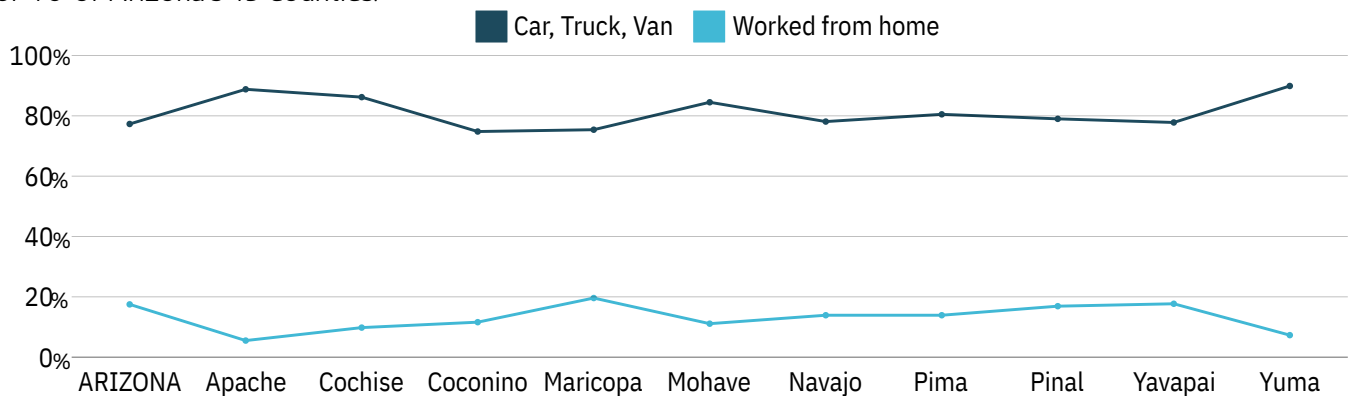


Figure 4. In 2023, Yuma and Apache counties reported the highest **rates of commuting by car, truck, or van**, while Maricopa and Yavapai had the highest rates of residents **working from home**. Data were only available for 10 of Arizona's 15 counties.



In Arizona, the predominant means of transportation was by car, truck, or van, which accounted for 77.3% of commutes. In contrast, more active forms of transportation were notably low, with only 1.7% of adults walking to work and 0.6% biking. The heavy reliance on personal vehicles and minimal rates of active commuting and public transit use, may have contributed to physical inactivity. Moreover, differences between urban and rural areas may influence transportation choices. Urban areas may have more accessible infrastructure but face challenges such as insufficient safety along walking and biking routes. Rural communities are more spread out, making transportation less feasible. To address these differences, Arizona may consider geographically tailored interventions, for example enhancing active transportation options in urban areas with lower rates of walking and biking.

Addressing Arizona's Active Transportation Needs

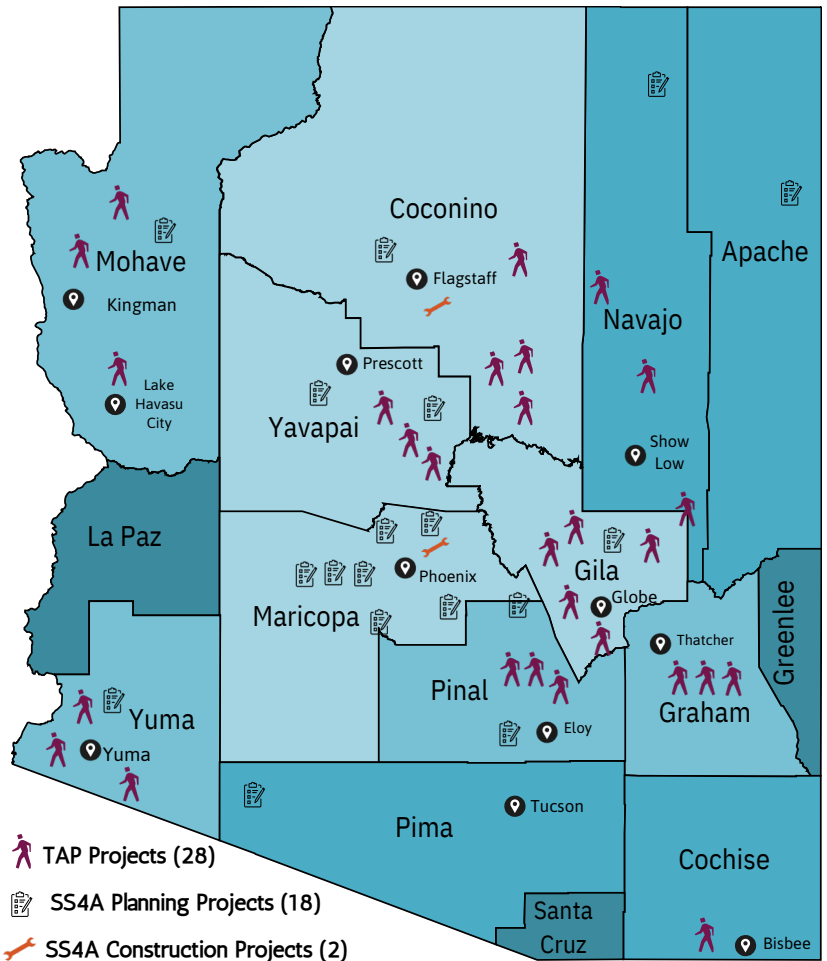
Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT)

The [Transportation Alternatives Program \(TAP\)](#) provides funding for community-based projects aimed at improving non-motorized transportation infrastructure, such as walking and biking paths. [Safe Streets and Roads for All \(SS4A\)](#) supports comprehensive planning and implementation efforts to prevent roadway deaths and serious injuries, particularly in underserved communities.

In 2023, counties like Maricopa, Gila, Pinal, Yavapai, and Coconino demonstrated a relatively high level of investment in transportation alternatives and safety initiatives, suggesting these areas may already have projects in place to address identified needs. Directing resources and support to underserved counties can improve transportation infrastructure and safety in these areas.

This highlighted a broader issue reflected in Arizona's statewide data for physical activity behaviors, transportation barriers, and commuting patterns. Two counties, La Paz and Santa Cruz, had no active transportation projects combined with higher reported rates of physical inactivity and lack of reliable transportation. These counties present an opportunity for Arizona SPAN to target its efforts at underserved communities with an expressed need for safe, accessible transportation options, including walking and biking where relevant. Apache and Cochise, which also showed high need but low project activity, may benefit from additional support and resources for active living improvements. Prioritizing these high-need counties may help maximize impact and address the most significant gaps in Arizona's active transportation infrastructure.

Figure 5. As of 2023, 48 ADOT and SS4A projects were operating across 12 of Arizona's 15 counties. There were no active projects in Greenlee, La Paz, or Santa Cruz counties, and just one planning project in Apache and Pima Counties.



Arizona State Report Card

The Safe Routes Partnership: [Making Strides State Report Cards](#) provide a comprehensive overview of Arizona's performance in promoting walking, biking, and active communities. The report cards summarize a total of 26 indicators across four main topic areas: *Complete Streets and Active Transportation Policy and Planning*, *Federal and State Active Transportation Funding*, *Safe Routes to School Funding and Supportive Practices*, and *Active Neighborhoods and Schools*. States are rated using four categories: 'Lacing Up'  (just getting started), 'Warming Up'  (in early implementation), 'Making Strides'  (multiple policies established), and 'Building Speed'  (leading with comprehensive support). Arizona's overall score improved, earning a 'Warming Up' designation in [2024](#), up from the 'Lacing Up' designation in the [2022 report](#).

Arizona scored the highest in two key areas: *Federal and State Active Transportation Funding* (**Making Strides**) and *Active Neighborhoods and Schools* (**Warming Up**). While these areas still had room for improvement, they may not be the highest priority when addressing urgent needs. In contrast, the topics mentioned earlier, such as Safe Routes to Schools Funding and Complete Streets Policies, remain in the 'Lacing Up' stage and may be of particular interest for improvement efforts:

Complete Streets and Active Transportation Policy and Planning



Complete Streets Policies (Score: 0/25) – Arizona has yet to adopt a statewide Complete Streets policy.



Active Transportation Goals & Planning (Score: 10/15) – While Arizona has a state transportation plan, it does not have state goals to increase walking and biking mode shares.

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Funding and Supportive Practices



Safe Routes to School Funding (Score: 5/27) – Arizona provided funding for SRTS non-infrastructure projects but did not dedicate state or other funding, offer planning grants or mini-grants, or provide special consideration for SRTS projects through TAP funds.



Safe Routes to School Supportive Policies (Score: 2/23) – Arizona has incorporated SRTS into a state active transportation plan, but the state did not staff its SRTS program, lacked a resource center for technical assistance, and did not fully support equitable access to SRTS programming.

Arizona's score of 10/40 in the Complete Streets and Active Transportation Policy and Planning and a 7/50 score in the Safe Routes to Schools Funding and Supportive Practices topics highlighted a significant need for improvement in supporting safe, active transportation for Arizona. To address this, Arizona may wish to focus on dedicating state funding for Safe Routes to Schools programs and providing more robust support, including planning grants, technical assistance, staffing, and other supportive practices to enhance the safety and accessibility of active transportation to schools.

What's Already Happening Statewide?

Several organizations already play a key role in supporting Arizona's active living infrastructure, including the six listed below.



The ADOT Active Transportation Program promotes walking, biking, and other non-motorized forms of transportation. It provides resources, safety tips, maps, and policies to support active transportation efforts statewide. The program emphasizes sustainable transportation planning and includes initiatives like the [Pedestrian Safety Action Plan](#), [Bicyclist Safety Action Plan](#), and the [Complete Transportation Guidebook](#), aimed at integrating walking and biking into broader transportation projects to enhance safety and mobility.



The [Arizona Alliance for Liveable Communities \(AALC\)](#) is dedicated to improving community health through better transportation and community design. One of their core initiatives focuses on transportation equity, aiming to create safe, accessible infrastructures for walking, biking, and public transit. The AALC advocates for infrastructure that supports healthy, active living, especially for historically underserved communities.



The [Arizona Trails 2025 Plan](#) is a strategic guide for acquiring, developing, and managing motorized and non-motorized trails across the state. It promotes outdoor recreation and helps allocate federal and state funding for trail construction, land acquisition, and amenities like signage and restrooms. The plan supports non-motorized trail development, which encourages walking, biking, and other forms of active transportation by improving infrastructure and making trails more accessible to Arizona communities.



The [Drachman Institute's Transportation Research Institute](#) at the University of Arizona is a research-focused entity that brings together multiple disciplines to tackle transportation challenges, including those related to active living. A key aspect of their work involves exploring how transportation impacts public health, particularly through transportation and land use integration, which plays a crucial role in creating walkable and bikeable communities. This integration supports active transportation modes such as walking, biking, and public transit with a focus on transportation equity and health disparities.



The [Arizona Partnership for Healthy Communities](#) promotes active living by integrating walking, biking, and transportation strategies into community design. It brings together public health, housing, and transportation sectors to create safer, more accessible infrastructure that encourages physical activity. By focusing on equitable community planning, the partnership helps develop policies that support walking and biking, while improving access to transportation options with a special focus on underserved communities.



The [AZ Health Zone](#) (AZHZ) promotes healthy eating, active living, and community wellness through various initiatives. They work with local communities, schools, and organizations to implement nutrition education, improve access to healthy foods, encourage physical activity, and create sustainable PSE changes that support healthier lifestyles. Their efforts also emphasize community design, ensuring neighborhoods are more activity-friendly and accessible, supporting active transportation.

Interview Findings: Community Readiness

Some AZHZ local implementing agencies (LIA) have been especially engaged in supporting community-level active living. Two LIA managers from the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension in Cochise and the Yavapai County Community Health Services participated in interviews, offering rich insight into their communities' active living challenges, existing partnerships, needs, and opportunities around PSE change. A thematic analysis explored these topics as well as the LIAs' readiness to implement the Active Communities Tool.

Challenges. LIAs in both counties faced challenges in implementing active living programs, primarily related to funding, limited capacity, and organizational constraints. Both LIAs experienced barriers around limited funding. In addition, the LIA in Cochise expressed difficulty understanding available funding opportunities.

"Funding is a big one...the lack of understanding of funding. I'll get something in my email that's like 'safe sidewalks grant'...[but] I don't necessarily have the capacity to open it, read it, study it, and understand it."

-UA Cooperative Extension, Cochise

"Our budgets are very tight...this is the first year that we are working on a deficit, and it's scary. We are always looking for grants to apply for."

-Yavapai County Community Health Services

Partnerships and Collaborations. Both LIA managers emphasized the importance of partnerships in sustaining their active living initiatives. They described collaborating with various organizations, from local government to nonprofit. They spoke about the value of city government partnerships to achieve shared goal, but they also shared different experiences working with their Parks and Recreation Departments.

"[We nurture] partnerships with the Parks and Recreation Department, so we can get to the point where they want to have these conversations with us...like understanding where does the money come from? Where can community members give input? So that has been super helpful."

-UA Cooperative Extension, Cochise

"We don't have a [county-level] Parks and Recreation Department. It's almost easier to work with our [community] partners than it is to work within our own organization. So, we end up partnering with a lot of cities' Parks and Recreation Departments. And I would say, most of our collaborations are local government jurisdictions and a couple [of] nonprofits."

-Yavapai County Community Health Services

Both LIAs experienced similar pushback when attempting to collaborate with organizations to advance active living initiatives. For the LIA in Cochise, this resistance came from city governments, while the LIA in Yavapai encountered challenges with the Parks and Recreation Department.

"I would like to see the partnerships with the city governments go deeper. I think that there's a lot we could partner on, and I feel like it doesn't happen sometimes because either they don't fully understand that we could be supportive of that, or sometimes, you know there's 'this is my turf, this our project.' So not on our end, but from the county. So that's sometimes hard."

-UA Cooperative Extension, Cochise

"Sometimes it's frustrating, because nobody wants to [do], for example, trail work. Nobody wants to do it because they're like, 'Oh, that's not our department, and we don't have capacity to do that.'"

-Yavapai County Community Health Services

Support and Technical Assistance. Both LIAs saw SPAN as a potentially key partner in overcoming their identified challenges, particularly by providing technical assistance, resources, and funding.

"[We could use] a 10-step guide, a binder full of [guidance] to start an active transportation project [and include]: Here's how you recruit partners, here's how you communicate this to the community, here's ideas for getting started...Maybe even infographics on this is why it's important for families with young children to get outside, these are important things when we're thinking about accessibility...And then [for] the funding, 'Hey, this is what this would cost, and if the county could allocate funds here, here's the return on investment. But if they can't, here's five grants or five funding opportunities that we're willing to support and work with you on'...So, maybe having an approach."

-UA Cooperative Extension, Cochise

"Well, if we were to implement like a toolkit, it would be cool for [SPAN] to come, either give technical assistance or a presentation and do it with us. We had AZ Health Zone do a WALC Audit with us, and that was fun...ADOT had a biking and walking specialist. For a while she would come and do presentations, and that was really helpful. It's really cool when folks in that area come see us. We aren't that far away."

-Yavapai County Community Health Services

Readiness for the Active Communities Tool. LIAs in both counties showed a strong willingness to adopt the Active Communities Tool, though their levels of preparedness varied based on the community selected.

"Oh, I think yeah, we're ready now....Probably Cottonwood. We have relationships with our planners there, and they would probably be on board. And then Clarkdale. It's a small community, but they have a pretty robust walking [and] biking plan happening. It's in its early stages. So, they're pretty passionate as well."

-Yavapai County Community Health Services

"I think it depends on the community. I have a spectrum of the different communities that would be good for this and are ready. I would say Douglas would be a great option. They have a really active city council, and city government in general, and really good partners. They have a healthy community committee called 'Step up with Douglas' that they are kind of in the phase right now of trying to identify their next direction. And so, this assessment may be that...there's a lot of untapped potential there. There's so many organizations and community members ready to take the jump into something they just have not."

-UA Cooperative Extension, Cochise

In conclusion, the thematic analysis of Cochise and Yavapai LIA interviews revealed shared challenges in promoting active living initiatives, particularly around funding, capacity, and organizational barriers. Both counties emphasized the critical role of partnerships in sustaining their programs, noting the value of collaborations with city governments and local organizations. While Cochise faced unique challenges, including having only one TAP project and moderately high rates of physical inactivity, both LIAs expressed eagerness to implement the Active Communities Tool despite varying levels of preparedness. Both LIAs recognize the importance of building local capacity for long-term success.

SPAN is viewed as a potential key partner in providing technical assistance and funding support to overcome these barriers. The strong community engagement and commitment in their respective counties offer hope that, with the right support, their active living initiatives can continue to thrive. It's also worth noting that none of the highest-need counties were selected for interviews in this initial evaluation phase. As a potential next step in the SPAN Year 2 evaluation, interviewing high-need counties like Santa Cruz, Apache, and La Paz could help assess their interest in the Active Communities Tool and provide further insights.



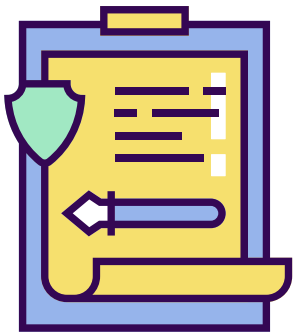
Recommendations

Focus Efforts on Underserved and Rural Areas

The analysis highlighted counties such as Apache, La Paz, and Santa Cruz as having high levels of physical inactivity, few to no active projects, and transportation limitations. In Cochise and Santa Cruz counties specifically, the Douglas and Nogales communities can potentially join efforts to address multiple challenges. SPAN may wish to prioritize these geographical regions during resource allocation, further information gathering, and programming planning such as technical assistance, infrastructure improvements, grant-writing support, and implementing the Active Communities Tool.



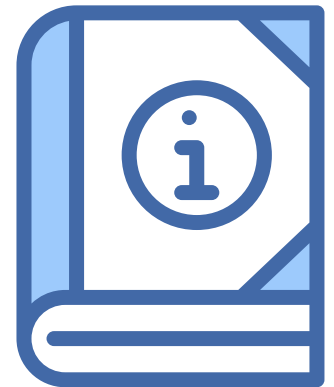
Support Development of Active Transportation Policies



Arizona scored low in the *Making Strides 2024 State Report Card*, in the Complete Streets policies and Safe Routes to School funding categories. This suggests a need for stronger active transportation policies. Indeed, the CDC considers state-level (or "Big P") policy change as a first priority in supporting improvements to community-level physical activity infrastructure. Thus, SPAN implementers may wish to collaborate with state and local governments around either or both of these initiatives, including but not limited to collective efforts to secure funding.

Increase Technical Assistance and Capacity-Building Support

At the local level, the two AZHZ LIAs interviewed felt their Active Living programming could benefit from SPAN support. Specifically, they experienced challenges related to understanding funding opportunities, accessing funding, and initiating transportation projects in partnership with local communities. SPAN may wish to consider providing technical assistance and/or developing user-friendly toolkits—or leveraging existing ones from ADOT—as state-level guides for starting and maintaining an active living program. SPAN supports may also include the collaborative development and distribution of resources and trainings for community members and local partner organizations.



Strengthen and Expand Partnerships



Partnerships with local city governments, Parks and Recreation Departments, and other community organizations are vital to advancing physical activity initiatives, but programs encounter difficulties in establishing and/or maintaining these partnerships. To reduce barriers, SPAN may seek to formalize select partnerships and/or develop methods and trainings to better prepare local agencies for relationship building.