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Physical activity promotion at the local government level among the local community

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Abstract

Physical inactivity is a major public health issue. For the prevention and management of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), such as cardiovascular disease, type-2 diabetes, and a number of malignancies, regular physical activity is a critical protective factor. Along with helping to maintain a healthy weight and overall wellbeing, physical activity has positive effects on mental health, including the avoidance of cognitive decline and the symptoms of despair and anxiety. Local governments all across the world have responded to this problem by launching population-level projects that give locals access to exercise opportunities. Local governments, through the implementation of their own tasks of health promotion and protection, carry out public health tasks as defined by the Law of 11 September 2015 on Public Health. These tasks include activities in the area of physical activity.

The aim of the article was to show the role of local government in promoting physical activity among the local community. The article discusses such issues as WHO recommendations for physical activity as well as activities undertaken by local governments in the area of health promotion in the form of health policy programs and activities carried out in cooperation with NGOs.

Keywords: physical activity, health policy programs, local government units, public health

Background

According to the WHO, physical activity is any skeletal muscle-driven movement that involves the use of energy [1]. All movement, whether done for recreation, transportation to go to and from locations, or as part of a person's job, is considered physical exercise. Both vigorous and moderate physical activity are beneficial to health. Walking, cycling, wheeling, sports, active recreation, and play are all common methods to be active that anyone may do for fun and at any ability level. It has been demonstrated that regular exercise helps control and prevent noncommunicable diseases like diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and a number of malignancies. Additionally, it lowers blood pressure, supports a healthy body weight, and enhances mental health, wellbeing, and quality of life [2].

For the prevention and management of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), such as cardiovascular disease, type-2 diabetes, and a number of malignancies, regular physical activity is a critical protective factor. Along with helping to maintain a healthy weight and overall wellbeing, physical activity has positive effects on mental health, including the avoidance of cognitive decline and the symptoms of despair and anxiety. According to global estimates, 27.5% of adults and 81% of adolescents [3, 4] do not meet the WHO recommendations for

physical activity from 2010 [5], and there have been essentially no improvements over the last ten years.

In order to boost physical activity among the population, institutional and community reforms are required. Local and state health departments are well-positioned to act as catalysts for these changes. Focus should be placed on strategies that are supported by research, such as advocating for high-quality physical education in schools, community-based social networks and organized physical activity programs, as well as organizational practices, policies, and initiatives that encourage physical activity at work [6]. In communities where the built environment significantly hinders physical activity, health departments must also pay attention to land use and transportation policies and practices. This is especially important in economically disadvantaged communities that are disproportionately affected by chronic disease [7].

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Guidelines On Physical Activity

The world health organization's 2020 published Who Guidelines on Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour. No matter a person's gender, cultural background, socioeconomic status, or level of ability, the public health recommendations made in the WHO Guidelines on physical activity and sedentary behavior apply to all populations and age groups from 5 years old to 65 years and older. Women who are pregnant or recently gave birth, as well as anyone with disabilities or chronic medical issues, should make an effort to follow the instructions as much as they are able to. For children, adolescents, adults, and older adults, the WHO Guidelines on physical activity and sedentary behavior offer evidence-based recommendations for public health regarding the amount of physical activity (frequency, intensity, and duration) necessary to offer significant health benefits and mitigate health risks. Recommendations are made for subpopulations such pregnant and postpartum women, persons with chronic diseases, and people with disabilities, as well as on the correlations between sedentary behavior and health outcomes for the first time [8].

The population's level of physical activity does not rise as a result of national guidelines alone. They ought to be viewed as a component of an all-encompassing policy

framework and used to guide the development of programs and legislative measures to encourage physical activity. Guidelines must be communicated to relevant audiences, and the World Health Organization suggests running ongoing national communication programs to raise awareness of the many advantages of regular physical activity and discourage sedentary behavior [9]. However, policies that foster favorable settings and the provision of opportunities for physical activity engagement must be supported by communication campaign activities in order to affect lasting behavior change. It is crucial to take into account the local context when establishing policies and procedures to support behavior change, including the complex multisector institutions with an interest or function in physical activity promotion as well as the local health system. At this point, it is also worth emphasizing the large role of local government. [8].

The Global Action Plan on Physical Activity 2018–2030 detailed 20 suggested policy initiatives and interventions and set a target to eliminate physical inactivity by 15% by 2030 [10]. With "ACTIVE," a technical package of toolkits that offers advice on how to encourage physical activity across the life course and through a variety of contexts, WHO is assisting all nations in putting the GAPP recommendations into practice. The World Health Organization (WHO) will create a number of implementation tools to help nations plan, carry out, and assess the implementation of the Global Action Plan, the first of which is the ACTIVE technical package. It identifies the essential policies under each of the following four policy action areas, which are directly reflective of the four Global Action Plan objectives agreed by the World Health Assembly in May 2018: Active Societies, Active Environments, Active People, Active Systems [11].

The purpose of Active People is to ensure access to opportunities, programmes and services across multiple settings to engage people of all ages and abilities in regular physical activity. In all of the following 6 actions the local government can take an active part [11]:

- Schools: Ensure provision of good-quality physical education and positive opportunities for physical activity across pre-primary to tertiary educational settings.
- Health care: Implement systems of patient assessment and counselling on physical activity in primary and secondary health care and social services.
- Multiple other settings: Implement programmes in workplace, sport and faithbased settings, and in public open spaces and other community venues, to increase opportunities for physical activity.

- Older adults: Provide appropriately-tailored programmes and services to support older adults to start and maintain regular physical activity.
- Least active: Implement programmes and services that increase the opportunities for physical activity in the least active groups.
- Whole-of-community: Engage communities to implement comprehensive initiatives at the city, town or local level.

The role of local government in physical activity

Physical inactivity is a major public health issue. Local governments all across the world have responded to this problem by launching population-level projects that give locals access to exercise opportunities. These interventions have included, for instance, the construction of cycling and walkways, the creation of easily accessible and secure green spaces, the provision of low-cost gym memberships, or the provision of free fitness programs [12].

In Poland, activities related to the promotion of a healthy lifestyle (including regular physical activity), addressed to different groups of people, are implemented in three sectors: public (governmental and self-governmental institutions), economic (organizations operating for profit) and non-governmental (non-profit organizations) [13]. Local governments, through the implementation of their own tasks of health promotion and protection, carry out public health tasks as defined by the Law of 11 September 2015 on Public Health. These tasks include [14]:

- monitoring and evaluation of the health status of the population, health risks and quality of life related to the health of the population;
- health education adapted to the needs of different groups of the population, in particular children, young people and the elderly;
- health promotion,
- disease prevention,
- activities to identify, eliminate or reduce risks and damage to physical and mental health in the environment of residence, learning, work and recreation,
- reduction of health inequalities resulting from socio-economic conditions,
- activities in the area of physical activity.

Tasks related to the promotion of physical activity among the local community can be implemented by local governments in the form of activities planned within health policy programs or in the form of activities carried out by non-profit organizations whose statutory goals are related to the discussed scope of activities [14]. In accordance with the Act on health

care services financed from public funds, the health policy programs particularly refer to important epidemiological phenomena, significant health problems concerning the whole or a specific group of recipients with the existing possibilities of elimination or reduction of these problems and implementation of new medical procedures and prophylactic undertakings [15]. Such a problem is undoubtedly the growing population of people who do not take up physical activity at all or do it insufficiently.

Activities to promote physical activity are primarily an integral part of health policy programs that address the prevention of overweight and obesity. Such programs target both the child and adolescent populations as well as the adult and elderly populations. Health policy programs are evaluated by the Agency for Health Technology Assessment and Tariffication. The Agency stresses that a very important role in preventing the development of overweight and obesity is played by developing appropriate habits related to physical activity. The optimal time spent on physical activity is 60 minutes. Recommendations indicate that this activity should be undertaken daily or almost daily. Specifically recommended forms of exercise include brisk walking, cycling, swimming, and water exercise. Increasing physical activity levels can be achieved from 2-3 years of age through active play, walking, using a tricycle and after 5-6 years of age by also promoting participation in sports activities 2/3 times a week [16]. Interventions aimed at increasing physical activity levels should focus on activities that are easy to implement in daily (e.g. walking). They should be tailored to individual preferences, living conditions and aim to improve people's confidence in their ability to change (e.g. through verbal persuasion, modelling of behaviour related to physical activity, discussing the positive effects) [17].

Currently, there are about 95,000 registered NGOs in Poland. Among associations and other social organizations, the most numerous group are physical culture associations and sports associations. These are organizations whose activities are related to recreation, sport, tourism (almost 20 thousand). As a primary goal of their activities, these organizations usually cite organizing leisure time and recreation (49%) [18]. In order for there to be cooperation between NGOs and local governments In order for cooperation to take place between NGOs and local governments, attention should be paid to on mutual informing about plans, plans and directions of activities of organizations and local governments. The flow of information in the other direction, from NGOs to local governments, is also important. The lack of such information leads to a situation in which local governments often do not know what potential local NGOs have [19]. It cannot be denied that the activities of NGOs have a significant impact on the activity of local communities. The importance and positive impact of local organizations on the

creation of public policy, as well as the development and activation of a given area, is increasingly emphasized. Actions at the local level are more effective - local NGOs know better the potential of their environment, they are more skillful in reacting to social problems and can adapt their activities to the real needs of their inhabitants [20]. Initiatives of non-governmental organizations in Poland in the area of physical culture focus on actions aimed at different age groups (about 60% for the elderly, about 40% for children and youth). The main theme of these actions is the promotion of a healthy and active lifestyle, as well as prevention of civilization diseases). These activities are dominated by outdoor events and cyclical activities (maximum 6 months). The beneficiaries of projects implemented by non-governmental organizations usually emphasize the importance of activities related to the promotion of a healthy and active lifestyle, both in the field of integration of local communities and promotion of proper patterns of active leisure. The local community recognizes the value of motivating people to undertake physical activity and take better care of their health and fitness. and physical fitness [13].

Summary

Physical inactivity is a major public health issue. For the prevention and management of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), such as cardiovascular disease, type-2 diabetes, and a number of malignancies, regular physical activity is a critical protective factor. Along with helping to maintain a healthy weight and overall wellbeing, physical activity has positive effects on mental health, including the avoidance of cognitive decline and the symptoms of despair and anxiety. Local governments all across the world have responded to this problem by launching population-level projects that give locals access to exercise opportunities. Local governments, through the implementation of their own tasks of health promotion and protection, carry out public health tasks as defined by the Law of 11 September 2015 on Public Health. These tasks include activities in the area of physical activity.

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