



Social Support

- Social support networks are formal or informal groups that form relationships that make individuals feel valued and committed to others in the group.
- Supportive environments make it easier for people to engage in physical activity and make it more challenging for people to be sedentary.
- Group commitments create a supportive environment for physical activity because the commitment to the group (mutual obligation) acts as an incentive to continue to be physically active.
- Promoting existing social support networks, such as walking and cycling clubs, and incorporating physical activity into existing social support networks (e.g., faith-based, civic organizations, book clubs, etc.) in your community can encourage community members to get active.
- Social support networks can exist anywhere there are groups of people: at the workplace, in schools, in housing facilities, in the community, and more.
- Forming new social support networks will get community members talking about the new program—a first step in creating a physical activity-friendly community.

Why This Is Important

- It is no secret that Maine has a weight problem. Sixty-one percent of Maine adults are overweight or obese (Maine Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2004).
- Fifteen percent of kindergartners and 13% of middle and high school students in Maine are overweight. (Maine YRBS, 2003)
- Experts agree that even 30 minutes of moderate daily physical activity for adults, 60 minutes for children, can reduce the incidence of obesity and chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, hypertension, and diabetes.
- We're not there yet. More than 60% of Americans are not active enough to obtain the health benefits associated with physical activity.
- Environmental and policy changes favoring physical activity make it easier for everyone to choose healthier habits.
- Studies have shown that higher levels of social support are associated with lower levels of physical disease, lower risk of mortality, and better mental health.
- Identifying or creating different social support networks for a variety of physical activity options in your community makes community initiatives more friendly and fun.