



HEALTHY AGING

IMPROVING AND EXTENDING QUALITY OF LIFE AMONG OLDER AMERICANS 2011

Stepping Up to a More Walkable

Hendersonville

Public Health Problem

In the coming decades, the number of U.S. adults aged 65 years or older will continue to increase, reaching 71 million people by 2030. This dramatic shift in the country's population will have significant implications for our communities and the decisions that need to be made about services and infrastructure. One area that is especially important for older adults is pedestrian safety. As people get older, they can develop age-related problems such as arthritis, poor vision, and poor balance that make it harder to get around. Communities that are properly planned make it easier for all residents, especially older adults, to walk without the fear of falling or being hit by cars.

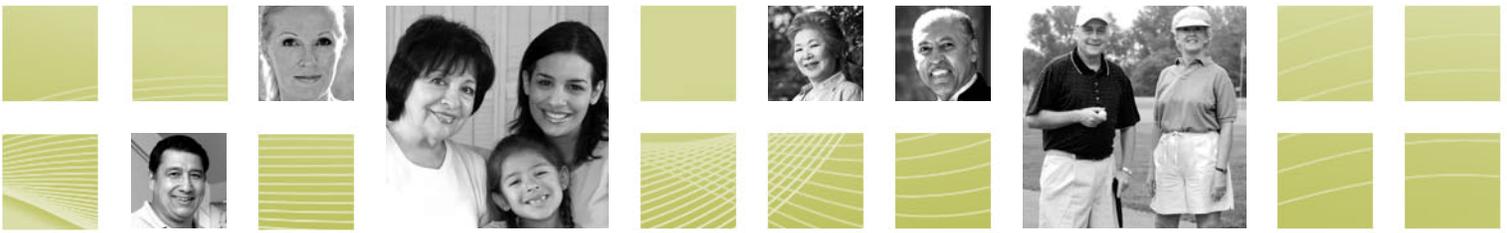
In the United States, 1 of 3 adults aged 65 years or older falls each year, and falls are the leading cause of injury-related death for this age group. People aged 70 or older have a higher rate of death from being hit by cars than any other age group, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

All residents should be able to walk safely in their communities, whether for physical activity, enjoyment, or simply to get where they want to go. For older adults, being able to walk not only promotes physical and mental well-being, but it also helps them to stay more connected to their communities. Any actions taken to improve pedestrian safety for this group will automatically benefit all residents.

Taking Action

To address this public health concern, community leaders in Hendersonville, North Carolina, came together to implement a pilot program called *Walk Wise, Drive Smart*. The goal of the program is to make neighborhoods in Hendersonville and surrounding areas more pedestrian-friendly for older adults. Hendersonville is an ideal testing ground for this program because more than 30% of residents are aged 65 years or older.





Walk Wise, Drive Smart is supported in part by CDC's Healthy Aging Research Network (HAN), which is funded by CDC's Healthy Aging Program and is part of a network of Prevention Research Centers that work with community partners across the country. The program is led by the University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center, the City of Hendersonville, and the Council on Aging for Henderson County.

These organizations have a well-established partnership that includes more than 75 other organizations, such as a senior center, local hospitals, a transportation group, an environmental and conservation organization, the county health department, local YMCA and AARP affiliates, and the Area Agency on Aging. The program also is an integral part of the Henderson County Livable and Senior Friendly Community Initiative, which serves more than 100,000 people throughout the county, and it is supported by the local business community.

To plan the *Walk Wise, Drive Smart* program, officials assessed walking conditions in 10 Hendersonville neighborhoods. They collected information with the HAN Environmental Audit Tool and through a series of neighborhood meetings and interviews. The resulting data pointed to the need to provide walking programs for people at different levels of fitness and to improve pedestrian facilities (e.g., sidewalks, crosswalks, traffic signals) to reduce walking hazards for older adults. The data also indicated a need to change the driving habits of residents to get them to slow down and yield to pedestrians.

To build community awareness and support for pedestrian safety, program officials

- Developed pedestrian safety plans.
- Conducted walking audits of individual neighborhoods.
- Established neighborhood walking routes.
- Upgraded pedestrian facilities on walking routes in selected neighborhoods.
- Developed walking maps and materials on how to walk and drive safely.
- Installed outdoor benches at strategic locations.

One innovative feature of the *Walk Wise, Drive Smart* program is that it provides incentives (e.g., coupons for prize drawings) to courteous drivers (e.g., those who yield to pedestrians in crosswalks). The program also has an easy-to-use Web site that posts current information about program-sponsored walks, hikes, and presentations on pedestrian safety, as well as other walking-related events that are free and open to the public.

During its initial implementation phase, the program regularly collected community feedback through surveys and interviews. This information was used to ensure that the program was meeting residents' needs and interests.

Implications and Impact

Since the *Walk Wise, Drive Smart* program began in 2005, it has helped to educate city officials and residents in Hendersonville about pedestrian safety. It also has made it easier for city officials to plan and implement changes to the environment to improve local walkways and roadways.

For example, city officials focused on improving the safety and walkability of certain walking routes and designated them as "senior friendly." They modified traffic patterns in some neighborhoods to reduce speeding "drive-through" traffic. They also collected data to identify specific problems that could increase the risk of injury for walkers, and this information was used to promote policy changes.

The *Walk Wise, Drive Smart* program in Hendersonville demonstrates the power of city officials and informed citizens to work together to make policy and environmental changes to make it easier for all residents, especially older adults, to walk safely in their communities. Residents embraced the value of walking and created many new opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to participate.

This program can serve as a model for other small to midsize communities across the United States. More information about the *Walk Wise, Drive Smart* program is available online at <http://www.walk-wise.org>.