Changes in Policy-Maker Attitudes Towards Active Living Communities in Hawaii between 2007-2013

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Background
- Obesity and physical inactivity are major public health problems in the US.
- Numerous studies have shown a relationship between physical activity, built environment and policies.
- Public health practitioners indirectly influence policy by educating and advocating for healthy policies.
- A 2007 study conducted in Hawaii, found that obesity, lack of pedestrian crosswalks, and obesity were low priorities for policymakers.
- However, increasing traffic, poorly planned development and sprawl, and pedestrian safety were ranked as important for policymakers.
- Between 2007-2013, the Hawaii Department of Health funded coalitions in Maui and Kauai to educate elected officials.
- After the 2007 data was collected, Hawaii entered the great recession and slow recovery along with the other US States.

Objective
- To assess changes in key decision makers attitudes and priorities on Active Living Community (ALC) variables between 2007-2013.

Research Design
Mailed Survey
- A census sampling approach was used to select all Hawaii state and county elected officials as well as gubernatorial appointed officials of state departments and agencies (n = 189). Appointed state-level officials included the directors and deputy directors of all state departments, and appointed board members of state agencies.
- The survey asked respondents to rate the severity of 23 public health and social welfare problems in Hawaii (from -2: not a problem to +2: a problem of extreme importance). The 23 problems included five Active Living Community (ALC) variables (poorly planned development and sprawl; pedestrian safety; lack of pedestrian walkways, crosswalks, and sidewalks; increasing traffic; lack of recreational activities) and obesity.

Results
Sample
- 126 (70.4%) surveys completed in 2007
- 114 (60.3%) survey completed in 2013
- Gender was not significantly different between 2007 (61.3% male) and 2013 (62.3% male).
- Position type also did not differ with the sample comprised of 40.4% and 38.5% state elected officials in 2007 and 2013 respectively. 34.4% and 39.3% appointed department heads and 25.6% and 22.2% elected county officials.

Priority of ALC Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poorly Planned Development</td>
<td>72.1%</td>
<td>57.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Sprawl</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Recreational Activities</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>76.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedestrian Safety</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crosswalks and Sidewalks</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedestrian Safety</td>
<td>71.3%</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obesity</td>
<td>58.6%</td>
<td>69.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion
Between 2007 and 2013, the concern of policymakers over obesity increased dramatically.

However, concerns about traffic, poorly planned development and sprawl and pedestrian safety decreased.

At both time points, lack of recreational opportunities were viewed as one of the least important issues facing the state.

In 2013, economic issues (homelessness, cost of living, lack of good jobs, poverty) ranked relatively higher compared to development issues (traffic, sprawl, and pedestrian safety) in 2007.

Economic recessions can have strong effects on decision maker attitudes. Physical activity advocates should be aware of prevailing attitudes and look for windows of opportunity to advance the public health agenda.

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