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Health and Human Services

Healthy Iowans Newsletter

Iowa's State Health Assessment (SHA) and State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP)



Iowa is home to more than 2,000 miles of trails and nearly 900,000 bicycle riders. Cycling and trails provide more than a fun, outdoor recreation experience, they are powerful economic and health initiatives for the state of Iowa. The [Iowa Bicycle Coalition](#) - a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting bicycling and advancing bike safety, education, accessibility, and building a community of supporters - recently conducted a statewide [Economic and Health Impacts of Cycling & Trails Study](#) to better understand the impact across Iowa.

Discover how cycling and trails play a vital role in tackling three of Iowa's top health issues identified in the [State Health Assessment \(SHA\)](#): Active Living, Economic Stability and Income and Mental Health and Mental Disorders, and the ongoing work on Healthy Eating and Active Living in the [State Health Improvement Plan](#) (SHIP).

The Economic Impacts of Cycling and Trails

The study found that bicycling and trail use bring an impressive **\$1.4 billion** to Iowa's economy. Spending by recreational riders on gear, local bike shops, dining, lodging and infrastructure supports over **21,000 Iowa jobs** and generates **\$690 million** in wages. These factors illustrate just how fundamental cycling and trails are to Iowa's future by keeping dollars in our communities and promoting tourism.

Measuring symptoms is challenging due to their subjective nature. Many "symptoms may go unrecognized or unreported if people don't think they are important or related to an existing health condition" ([source](#)). Subtle symptoms such as fatigue, sleep disturbances, weight gain and depression can be early indicators of acute events or the need for hospitalization. Additionally, symptoms can appear

even when there are no changes in the progression of the disease, and the disease itself may advance without any symptoms. This underscores the importance of prioritizing comprehensive, person-centered care to effectively address health conditions.

Impacts on Physical Health

The benefits of cycling and trail use are not limited to their economic contributions. Studies have found that bicycling and trail use resulted in better health outcomes for Iowans. While it is no surprise that physical activity like cycling reduces the risk of chronic disease, the study results help to quantify the economic value of preventable chronic health conditions.

- **Diabetes:** Active cyclists are 25% less likely to have diabetes. Cycling prevents about 2,000 cases of diabetes in the state and prevents around \$25 million spent on diabetes treatment.
- **Breast Cancer:** Active cycling decreases the likelihood of breast cancer by 28% compared to the rest of the population. This translates to 160 fewer cases and \$21 million in avoided medical treatment costs.
- **Colorectal Cancer:** Iowa cyclists are 77% less likely to have colorectal cancer, representing 100 fewer cases statewide and \$16 million in avoided medical costs.
- **Obesity:** Active cyclists experience lower rates of obesity compared to the rest of the population, preventing \$25 million in medical expenses as a result. Currently, the healthcare spending, loss of life, absenteeism, and disability associated with obesity costs Iowa state residents \$4.5 billion annually.
- **High Blood Pressure:** Cyclists experience high blood pressure at lower rates. If this were not the case, there would be an increase of approximately 1,200 individuals with high blood pressure
- **Stroke:** Active cyclists are 12% less likely to experience a stroke and avoid \$35 million in related medical expenses.

Mental Health

The National Alliance on Mental Illness ([NAMI](#)) reports that 473,000 adults in Iowa have a mental health condition. Multiple studies have shown that physical activity can have a positive impact on mental health. Cycling and trail use is a great way to bring more movement into one's life and spend time outdoors. The Economic and Health Impacts of Cycling and Trails study found that compared to their non-cycling counterparts, cyclists are **49% less likely** to have experienced over 15 poor mental health days in a 30-day survey period, with **5,400 fewer** Iowans experiencing poor mental health annually.

What's Next?

Cycling and trail use bring a well-rounded array of benefits to the state of Iowa,

improving the economy, workforce, attracting and keeping talent, helping rural areas grow and improving quality of life. Iowa Bicycle Coalition Executive Director, Luke Hoffman, views the impactful results of this study as an opportunity to advocate for policies that support safe cycling and increased trail project funding. Hoffman stated, “Our investments in bicycling infrastructure not only enhance economic and health outcomes but also position Iowa as a leader in outdoor recreation and bike tourism. Prioritizing safety and expanding infrastructure can further boost quality of life and economic and health benefits for the entire state.” Additional policies that promote safe cycling and trail improvement funding will increase the number of users, further increasing the economic and health benefits revealed in the study.

While Iowa ranks #5 in the country for spending on biking, the state ranks in the bottom ten of states for cycling safety and laws according to [The League of American Bicyclists' 2024 rankings](#). A hands-free law that prohibits handheld cellphone use while driving has been identified as a key piece of legislation to reduce distracted driving. The Iowa Bicycle Coalition and nearly 30 partner organizations have joined together in an End Distracted Driving Coalition, campaigning for the passage of a hands-free law this year.

What Can You Do to Support Cycling and Trails in Iowa?

- Learn more about the results of the [Economic and Health Impacts of Cycling & Trails Study](#) and share it with others
- Learn more about physical activity efforts across the state via the [SHIP](#) and [Partners in Action](#)
- Promote cycling in your community by participating in [Walk, Bike, and Roll to School Day](#) on May 7

Trainings and Events

[2025 Public Health Conference of Iowa](#)

- “This conference aims to bring together public health experts from national, state and local levels during keynote sessions, concurrent session presentations, and poster presentations to share best practices and lessons learned from the field. This year’s theme is ‘100 Years of Impact: Reflecting On Our Past to Shape Our Future.’ This milestone event will honor a century of public health achievements as we reflect on our past, celebrate our present, and shape the future of public health in our communities across Iowa.”
- Hosted by the Iowa Public Health Association
- Tuesday, April 1, 2025 and Wednesday, April 2, 2025

[Leveraging Social Media for Enhancing Public Health Communication: Practical Considerations for Public Health Agencies](#)

- “This webinar presents current evidence-informed principles and practices that public health agencies can apply toward using social media to enhance their communication and delivery of population health services.”
- Hosted by the Mid-Atlantic Regional Public Health Training Center
- Wednesday, April 2, 12:00-1:00pm CST

[Disaggregate It](#)

- “This training advances your understanding of and your ability to apply health equity frameworks to public health practice especially interpretation, use, and communication of data to diverse audiences for actionable change in your community.”
- Hosted by the Iowa Institute of Public Health Research and Policy
- Wednesday, April 9, 1:00-4:30pm CST

News and Resources

The Public Health Communication Collaborative (PHCC) has released a new resource titled [An Introduction to Food Safety](#).

- Food safety processes are essential to keeping communities healthy. Share PHCC's new resource with your community to:
 - Increase understanding of the guidelines and regulations that keep food safe.
 - Offer practical food safety tips.
 - Provide sources for information on current recalls or outbreaks.

The Iowa Cancer Registry has released their full 2025 Cancer in Iowa Report, available now on the [Iowa Cancer Registry's website](#).

- The Cancer in Iowa Report estimates cancer incidence and mortality rates for the state every year, along with cancer site information, demographics, and other data. The Report also focuses on a feature topic every year (past years have focused on alcohol as a risk factor, health disparities in Iowa, ovarian cancer, and HPV-related cancers), with this year's feature topic being survivorship.

It's Time to Move! The [Spring Into Summer](#) initiative provides Iowans with free access to the 6 week Walk with Ease Program.

- Coordinated by the [Physical Activity and Health Promotion Lab](#) in the Department of Kinesiology at Iowa State University, this customized version of Walk with Ease focuses on habit formation to help you adopt and sustain a more active lifestyle.
- [Registration](#) is open now through March 21st.

The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) has recently published a new toolkit: [Engaging Partners in a Virtual Space](#).

- This toolkit focuses on virtual engagement techniques that can improve working relationships between a health agency's internal staff and external partners, build organizational supports for virtual and hybrid meetings, and create the conditions for hosting successful meetings.

National Walk, Bike, and Roll to School Day comes back May 7th.

- [Register now](#) and join dozens of schools across Iowa for a healthier way to get to school. For help planning your event or wanting to do a Safe Routes Community Assessment contact [Matt Burkey](#), the Iowa Safe Routes to School Coordinator.
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Every day at HHS, we work to improve the lives of our fellow Iowans. As an agency it is important to keep focused on our mission; to help Iowans achieve healthy, safe, stable, and self-sufficient lives through the programs and services we provide.

For more information, please contact:
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