A Comprehensive Multi-Level Approach for Passing Safe Routes to School and Complete Streets Policies in Hawaii

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Background: Policy changes were needed to reshape the built environment for active transportation. Methods: Using the social ecological model as a framework, the Healthy Hawaii Initiative worked with a contractor to develop a series of meetings, planning sessions, and workshops. Activities spanned 22 months between 2007 and 2009, and involved multiple stakeholders, including educational outreach for legislators and collaborative planning sessions with advocates. Results: Ultimately, with the help of the contractor to initiate the process, Complete Streets and Safe Routes to School (SRTS) legislation were introduced January 2009. Advocacy groups monitored bill progress, testified at hearings, and assisted in rewording the bills. The SRTS statute required the Department of Transportation (DOT) to administer the federal SRTS funds and the complete streets law tasked the state and county DOTs to adopt complete streets policies and review existing highway design standards and guidelines. Both bills were signed into law June 2009. Conclusions: Focusing efforts at multiple levels of the social ecological model involving champions and key stakeholders led to the successful passage of legislation supporting active transportation. Tracking policy implementation and evaluation over time will help determine actual impact on active transportation behaviors across Hawaii.

Keywords: social-ecological model, elected officials, physical activity, legislation

Over the past 20 years, leisure-time physical activity rates have stabilized, while rates of obesity have climbed. Increases in non-leisure-time physical activity such as active commuting may be contributing to the obesity epidemic. Interventions to increase physical activity through individual and social approaches have shown modest effects. The social ecological model postulates that behavior is influenced by a variety of factors including not only individual level knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors but also policy, institutional, community, and societal level influences. Accordingly, community and policy-level interventions should have the greatest population reach and may be the most effective for widespread behavior change.

Nationwide, 2 policies have been gaining support to improve the safety of pedestrians and cyclists for active transportation: Safe Routes to School (SRTS) and Complete Streets. SRTS is a comprehensive approach to increase walking and biking to school through engineering, education, enforcement, encouragement and evaluation. Complete streets focus on safely accommodating all modes of transportation, prioritizing pedestrians and cyclists, through a variety of policies and practices. While both SRTS and complete streets include a variety of activities, statewide enabling legislation is often essential to ensure broad changes at the highest level of the social ecological model.

Public health professionals and advocates cannot enact policy directly. To have an impact, multisectoral partnerships are essential to influence key decision-makers who enact policies and procedures. This manuscript summarizes the process and lessons learned from passing SRTS and complete streets legislation at the state level using the framework of the social ecological model.

Methods

The Healthy Hawaii Initiative (HHI) was established in 2000 to lead statewide chronic disease prevention efforts for the Hawaii State Department of Health (DOH). HHI initially began to focus on improving the built environment for active transportation to address high rates of pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities and lack of prioritization of these issues by policy-makers in Hawaii.

For statewide policy change, HHI formulated a multilevel approach based on the social ecological model (Figure 1) to be delivered through a series of meetings, training sessions, and workshops with diverse stakeholders. HHI contracted with an expert consultant (Mark Fenton) who had a multidisciplinary background.
in physical activity, health, planning, and engineering. All efforts targeted involvement of influential champions (eg, Lieutenant [Lt.] Governor, Director of Health) as well as key stakeholders (eg, legislators, planners, advocates), and focused on capacity building through multidisciplinary partnerships. It was important to build multisectoral support along with capacity for policy enactment by the appropriate city, county, and state-level officials.

Table 1 displays a chronological list of activities, spanning 22 months (September 2007-June 2009). Unless specifically indicated, all activities took place in Honolulu County, were hosted by HHI and were facilitated by Mark Fenton.

Evaluation was incorporated from the beginning, coordinated by the Office of Public Health Studies at the University of Hawaii. Evaluation tools were individually designed for each activity querying understanding, information learned, presentation effectiveness and relevance, and suggestions for next steps.

**Results**

**Community Members**

Community members were invited to “Active Living Community Workshops” in Honolulu and Maui Counties. Despite various promotion strategies for the 3 Honolulu workshops (eg, flyers, newspaper advertisements), there were only 18 attendees. Redesigned recruitment strategies for the 6 Maui workshops targeted professionals, and included newsletter and local radio announcements, posters, letters, and individual phone calls by local coalition members, resulting in 58 attendees. Evaluation results indicated increased knowledge of the presented concepts for >50% of participants.

**Advocacy Groups**

Strategic planning sessions were held with community advocacy groups in August 2008. It is important to note that several organizations had already formed a coalition.
### Table 1  Chronological List of Healthy Hawaii Initiative Activities That Led to Safe Routes to School and Complete Streets Policy Changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity (number)</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Attendees (number)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 2007</td>
<td>Workshop</td>
<td>Earning Healthier Profits with Healthy Designs</td>
<td>Planners, Developers, Lt. Governor, State Director of Health (38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2007</td>
<td>Physical Activity and Nutrition (PAN) Summit</td>
<td>Good Health: The Ultimate Bottom Line</td>
<td>Representatives from businesses, federal/state/county government, schools and community agencies (302)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Throughout 2008</td>
<td>One-on-one Meetings</td>
<td>Education about active living communities and updates about planned activities</td>
<td>Representatives from departments of permitting and planning, county council members and county commissioners (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2008</td>
<td>Informational Meetings</td>
<td>Invitations to community workshops</td>
<td>State Representative, State Senator, City Councilmember (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 2008</td>
<td>Leeward Oahu Community Workshops (3)</td>
<td>Active Living Communities</td>
<td>Community residents, parents, state employees, advocates, students (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2008</td>
<td>Maui Community Workshops (6)</td>
<td>Active Living Communities</td>
<td>Community residents, business representatives, parents, state employees, advocates, students (58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2008</td>
<td>Survey of Planners and Developers</td>
<td>The Built Environment and Health</td>
<td>Planners, developers, architects, and landscapers (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2008</td>
<td>Strategic Planning Sessions</td>
<td>Active Living Communities</td>
<td>State Nutrition and Physical Activity Coalition and Department of Education representatives (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2008</td>
<td>PAN Forum</td>
<td>Good Health: Creating Active Living Communities</td>
<td>Representatives from government, community-based agencies, education, and businesses (98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2008</td>
<td>Planning Session</td>
<td>Achieving Complete Streets through Safe Routes to School</td>
<td>Representatives from government (elected and appointed officials), community-based agencies, and community advocacy groups, community advocates, state coalition members (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2008</td>
<td>Planning Session</td>
<td>Achieving Complete Streets through Safe Routes to School, Part II</td>
<td>Community advocacy organizations (Hawaii NPAC, HBL, PATH, One Voice, Sierra Club, Kailua Urban Design Task Force), government agencies (Hawaii State Departments of Health and Transportation, City and County of Honolulu Departments of Transportation Services, Planning and Permitting, and Police, and Hawaii, Kauai, and Maui Counties Planning Departments; 22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2008</td>
<td>Policy-maker’s breakfast</td>
<td>Creating more Livable, Activity, Healthy Communities</td>
<td>Elected officials from the Hawaii State Legislature, County Councils, appointed officials (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2009</td>
<td>Policies Introduced</td>
<td>Schools; Traffic Safety; Relating to Education (House Bill No. 983) Complete Streets; Roads and Highways; Relating to Transportation (Senate Bill No. 718)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>June 2009</td>
<td>Policies Signed into Law</td>
<td>Act 54 (SRTS) &amp; Act 100 (complete streets)</td>
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Participants prioritized “change zoning policies to create their work. Qualitative comments indicated the informa-
tion of participants felt issues discussed were important for
the Director of Health. Evaluation results indicated 67%
of communities.” Key speakers included the Lt. Governor and
participants who attended the 2007 PAN Summit) benefi-
cial networking opportunities.

called One Voice, with the goal of passing complete
streets legislation. One Voice was included in these ses-
tions. The consultant met with each group separately
for skill building, knowledge development, and action
planning, followed by a joint session. Over 90% indicated
improved knowledge of active transportation informa-
tion and design strategies. In the joint session, advocacy
groups prioritized shared goals with SRTS and complete
streets as key policy issues; however key stakeholders,
especially the Department of Transportation (DOT) and
the state SRTS Coordinator, were missing.

Planners and Developers

Key planners and developers (n = 38) attended an August
2007 workshop, “Earning Healthier Profits with Healthy
Designs.” The Lt. Governor and Director of Health
spoke about the importance of active transportation and
pedestrian and bicyclist safety. Discussion topics included
zoning, density, parking, permitting, and education. Over
half (61.5%) improved their understanding of the built
environment and physical activity, 50% learned strategies
for improving the built environment to promote physical
activity, and 58.3% felt these issues were extremely
important to their work. However, participants indicated
that current ordinances and standards were prohibitive.

A July 2008 planner and developer survey queried
issues and suggestions for healthy design. Though a small
sample (3 planners, 2 developers), respondents were
key stakeholders with opinions valued by their peers.
Suggestions included improving zoning codes and stan-
dards, increasing government leadership and knowledge,
improving pedestrian friendliness, allowing for mixed
use development, policy changes (including complete
streets), code changes to increase walkability, adding
bicycle facilities, providing incentives, and expediting
permits and reducing parking requirements.

Advocacy Groups, Transportation Planners, Education Professionals

A Physical Activity and Nutrition (PAN) Summit “Good
Health: The Ultimate Bottom Line” was held in October
2007 to introduce active transportation and community
design concepts to 302 attendees representing businesses,
schools, and community agencies. Speakers included
the Hawaii Governor, Lt. Governor, and the Director
of Health. Evaluation results indicated that >75% of
attendees improved their knowledge of built environment
concepts and strategies and 97% were provided with
beneficial networking opportunities.

In October 2008, a smaller PAN Forum (98 par-
ticipants with 44 who attended the 2007 PAN Summit)
focused on “Good Health: Creating Active Living Com-
unities.” Key speakers included the Lt. Governor and
the Director of Health. Evaluation results indicated 67%
of participants felt issues discussed were important for
their work. Qualitative comments indicated the informa-
tion presented and networking opportunities were helpful.
Participants prioritized “change zoning policies to create
a more walkable and bikeable Hawaii” and “adopt com-
plete streets legislation” as the most important policies
for creating active living communities.

Following the PAN Forum, an afternoon planning
session “Achieving Complete Streets through Safe Routes
to School” was held (n = 33). Ninety percent felt that com-
plete streets could be achieved through SRTS. Although
rated as highly collaborative and informational, 30% felt
the session was unsuccessful in developing a preliminary
plan to achieve complete streets through SRTS or iden-
tifying next steps for their organizations in this process.
Over 96% wanted to learn more about complete streets,
SRTS, and the connections between them. Missing key
stakeholders (although invited) included the Hawaii
SRTS Coordinator, State and County Planning officials,
legislators, and private schools.

Advocacy Groups, City, County, and State Planning, Health and Transportation
Officials

HHI recruited additional key stakeholders to a December
2008 follow-up planning session, “Achieving Complete
Streets through Safe Routes to School, Planning Session,
Part II.” Attendees included advocates and state and
county government employees from health, transportation,
and planning departments (n = 22). This session
resulted in a defined plan for achieving complete streets
through SRTS. All participants rated the session as pro-
ductive, collaborative, and helpful for networking. Par-
ticipants rated all activities as somewhat to very helpful
and were committed for continued efforts toward a state-
wide complete streets policy and SRTS programming.
Although invited, missing key stakeholders included
Department of Education representatives and the State
SRTS Coordinator.

State Legislators and Departmental
Officials

Throughout 2008, 6 individual meetings (plus other
informal conversations) were held with city and county
permitting and planning representatives, county council
members and county commissioners to explain and pro-
vide updates about planned activities and to engender
support. In March, an informational meeting invited
policy makers (ie, state representatives, state senators,
and city council members) to workshops planned for
their communities.

State Legislators

In December 2008, HHI convened 16 elected officials
at a policymaker’s breakfast to brief them on built envi-
ronment activities, highlight relevant local policies, and
provide national policy examples (eg, complete streets,
SRTS, zoning for active living) for implementation in
Hawaii. The consultant provided example language
for complete streets and SRTS policies and offered his
services as a resource for developing Hawaii legislation.
Policy Change

Legislators who attended the breakfast introduced SRTS (House Bill No. 983) and complete streets (Senate Bill No. 718) legislation in January 2009. Although legislators had the final vote on statewide policies, it was important to have broad stakeholder support. Many groups supported the policies under the umbrella of One Voice. For instance, AARP (senior citizens), YMCAs (children and families), bicycle league, trail advocates, and nutrition and physical activity coalitions. These advocacy groups closely monitored the bills, testified at hearings, and helped craft amendments. By hearing all of these diverse interest groups working together for a common cause, enough legislators were convinced to vote in favor of these policies.

The SRTS statute articulated expectations for the DOT administration of SRTS funds. The complete streets law tasked the state and county DOTs with adopting complete streets policies and establishing a temporary taskforce to review existing highway design standards and guidelines (see Table 2). In June 2009, both bills were signed into law by Hawaii’s Governor as Act 100 (SRTS) and Act 54 (complete streets).

Conclusions

A comprehensive multilevel social ecological approach was influential in the passage of SRTS and complete streets statewide policies in Hawaii. These policy changes resulted from concentrated educational, capacity building and networking efforts over a 2-year period. The approach was structured to facilitate collaboration of multiple stakeholders led by an expert consultant.

The model presented here may be useful for other states who are interested in passing similar legislation using a social ecological focus. The social ecological

Table 2 Description of Legislation for Safe Routes to School (SRTS) and Complete Streets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Act 100-SRTS (House Bill No. 983) <a href="http://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/session2009/Bills/HB983_CD1_.htm">http://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/session2009/Bills/HB983_CD1_.htm</a></td>
<td>Requires the director of transportation to provide federal SRTS program funds for school-based workshops and community-based planning projects that will reduce vehicular travel and congestion, encourage walking and bicycling, and promote health and safety. Requires the director to develop a streamlined process for the federal SRTS grant program. The director of transportation shall submit to the legislature a report of the status and progress of the SRTS program, no later than 20 days before the convening of the regular session of 2010. (1) Enhance traffic safety, especially around Hawaii’s schools; (2) Enable and encourage children to walk and bicycle to school; and (3) Make bicycling and walking to school a safer and more appealing transportation alternative through the federal SRTS program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act 54-Complete Streets (Senate Bill No. 718) <a href="http://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/session2009/bills/SB718_HD1_.htm">http://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/session2009/bills/SB718_HD1_.htm</a></td>
<td>Requires the department of transportation and the county transportation departments to seek to reasonably accommodate access and mobility for all users of public highways, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, motorists, and persons of all abilities. Establishes a temporary task force to review certain highway design standards and guidelines. Report to legislature in 2010 and 2011. The department of transportation and the county transportation departments shall adopt a complete streets policy that seeks to reasonably accommodate convenient access and mobility for all users of the public highways within their respective jurisdictions as described under section 264-1, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, motorists, and persons of all ages and abilities. (b) This section shall apply to new construction, reconstruction, and maintenance of highways, roads, streets, ways, and lanes located within urban, suburban, and rural areas, if appropriate for the application of complete streets. (c) This section shall not apply if: (1) Use of a particular highway, road, street, way, or lane by bicyclists or pedestrians is prohibited by law, including within interstate highway corridors; (2) The costs would be excessively disproportionate to the need or probable use of the particular highway, road, street, way, or lane; (3) There exists a sparseness of population, or there exists other available means, or similar factors indicating an absence of a future need; or (4) The safety of vehicular, pedestrian, or bicycle traffic may be placed at unacceptable risk.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
model was essential for moving the policy agenda forward in a collaborative way incorporating interests of multiple stakeholders. The goal of these efforts extended beyond merely introducing and passing the policies through the legislature; rather, the time and money used to facilitate the activities was spent to create broad changes in perspectives and priorities for successful policy and programmatic implementation.

Knowledge of targeted communities was also critical and was facilitated by working with coalitions, advocacy groups, and government officials in each county. Through this process we learned the best way to get multiple parties to the table was to enlist the aid of key stakeholders within the community who were both passionate about the issues at hand and trusted as leaders. We also made sure to invite the appropriate organizations or individuals to the appropriate levels or types of activities in order not to waste anyone’s time. Then, each activity was structured to either result in knowledge gain, formation of collaborative partnerships or a definitive agenda of next steps. Due to the involvement of multiple stakeholders, it was important to value everyone’s work including unique roles and resources each party could provide. For example, HHI was unable to advocate for legislation, while community advocates could do so.

Flexibility of HHI’s funding allowed for a variety of workshops, meetings, and planning sessions. Other “must haves” for success were the incorporation of evaluators and a contractor from the beginning. On-going evaluation allowed HHI to learn from each activity and capitalize on timely opportunities (eg, collaborating with advocacy groups interested in complete streets and SRTS). The consultant was especially skilled at facilitating communication and cooperation between groups.

The unique opportunities to collaborate at multiple levels across sectors in such a geographically isolated state such as Hawaii may differ for other states. Sparse attendance at Honolulu community workshops illustrated challenges for a state DOH of eliciting change from the grassroots level. Similarly, the absence of key stakeholders at some activities indicated a need to provide a higher level of stimulus for their engagement. Although collaborators had their own agendas and priorities, it was clear that everyone recognized the unique timing for the policy advancement.

Future plans include tracking policy implementation to determine impact on active transportation. Along with the governor, many state legislators are up for reelection in 2010. Thus, HHI and advocates will educate newly elected policy-makers as necessary. 

Acknowledgments

We are very grateful to the elected officials who attended HHI activities, introduced, supported, and voted for the SRTS and complete streets legislation including Representative Joe Bertram, III, Senator Kalani English, Senator Mike Gabbard, Representative Karen Awana, Representative Marilyn Lee, and City Council Member Todd Apo. Former Hawaii County Deputy Director of Planning Brad Kurakawa, and former Hawaii County Mayor Harry Kim were instrumental in our commencement of these activities. The help and support of community advocacy groups including AARP Hawaii, Hawaii Bicycling League, One Voice for Livable Islands, People’s Advocacy for Trails Hawaii, Kauai PATH, Oluwalu, and Jonathan Starr; local developers including Kimo Steinwascher—Kaneohe Ranch, Bill Frampton and Dave Ward of Olowalu Town, LLC; coalitions including Sandy McGuinness—Maui Nutrition & Physical Activity Coalition, Bev Brody, Get Fit Kauai-NPAC; and county government officials including the Lanai Department of Health, and Dave DeLeon and Jeff Hunt from the Maui County Department of Planning were invaluable. This project was funded by the Tobacco Settlement Special Fund, Healthy Hawaii Initiative, Hawaii State Department of Health.

References