

Public Health Advocacy for Bicycling

Why, what, and how.

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Summary

One of the most popular campaigns in the U.S. to promote bicycling took place in the mid-1950s. It was lead by Dr. Paul Dudley White, President Eisenhower's heart specialist, who advocated bicycling for cardiovascular health. Today, public health agencies and officials are again calling for more bicycling -- to help increase physical activity and reduce the risk of chronic disease. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US) estimate that physical inactivity contributes to at least 300,000 premature deaths each year in the U.S. Public health agencies in many parts of the world are taking up this issue, including the UK, Australia, Canada, the US, and the WHO (with its "Charter on Transport, Environment and Health). The public health community understands that land-use planning and transport policies are key determinants of how much bicycling (and walking) there will be in communities. To bring about real change, they are focusing on what they call "environmental and policy interventions." Now, they are conducting research studies to learn more about the kinds of actions that are most effective in making communities more bicycle-friendly, and how best to make the desired changes (in policies and the environment) come about. The challenge to bicycle advocates is to learn how best to work with these new allies to bring about real, sustained improvements that promote bicycling in our communities.