

## **Parks and Recreation: Building Healthy Communities and a Healthy Nation**



### **NRPA calls on Congress to: Appropriate a minimum of \$30 million for the CDC's Healthy Communities Program in FY 11.**

#### **Background:**

Chronic diseases, such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, are the leading causes of death and disability in the U.S. In fact, nearly half of all Americans suffer from chronic disease. As a result, chronic disease is now a national epidemic.

However, this epidemic did not develop over night and it became national in scope only as more and more local communities became affected.

Even those of us who do not suffer from chronic disease are impacted by it through increased healthcare costs. Treatment for people with chronic conditions accounts for more than 75% of the \$2 trillion spent on U.S. medical care costs annually.

According to the CDC, lack of physical activity, poor diet, and tobacco and excessive alcohol use contribute to the development and severity of many chronic diseases. These are all preventable risk factors.

Effectively preventing chronic disease is central to the future of our nation's economy, health care and the well-being of every American.

#### **Healthy Communities ACHIEVE Program:**

The purpose of the Healthy Communities Action Communities for Health, Innovation, and Environmental Change (ACHIEVE) program is to combat chronic disease by effecting change at the local level. This program brings together local leaders and stakeholders to build healthier communities by promoting policy and environmental change strategies that focus on increasing physical activity, improving nutrition, preventing tobacco use, asthma, and controlling cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

The Healthy Communities ACHIEVE program provides resources to communities that help them to turn the tide on the national epidemic of chronic diseases by working to change the places and

organizations that touch people's lives every day—schools, work sites, health care sites, summer and after school sites, and other community settings.

Since 2003, more than 240 communities have been selected to participate in CDC's Healthy Communities ACHIEVE Program, resulting in significant changes at the local level. During the next 3 years, about 180 additional communities will receive funding and technical support to activate change in their communities, improve safety, and provide healthy options for at-risk children.

#### **Effectively Reaching Communities:**

The program effects policy and environmental change at the local level by getting local leaders involved in developing solutions that will be most effective within individual communities. This strategy is employed through:

- The creation of a network of mentoring sites to teach other communities how to effect change and fight chronic disease;
- Working with state and local health departments and community-based organizations;
- Funding lead national partners with footprints in thousands of American communities in order to explore innovative approaches to creating healthy lifestyles through community change.

#### **Success At the Local Level:**

- **Salamanca, New York:** Successfully influenced adoption of city ordinance banning smoking in all city parks and on playgrounds.
- **Chicago, IL:** Has successfully changed park vending machine policies to focus on providing healthier options. Also providing an educational campaign in the community to explain why the vending machines are changing.
- **Pierre, SD:** The park and recreation department is working with schools and parent teacher organizations to promote healthy eating practices by updating school wellness policies to provide more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains in menu options, and implementing creative practices such as "sugar-free zones" in schools.

