



# Addressing the Built Environment to Encourage Physical Activity for Mothers and their Families



The built environment, either outdoor or indoor, can have a positive or negative impact on physical activity opportunities within a community. A supportive built environment encourages regular physical activity by making it easy, safe and fun. This benefits all community members including mothers who want to be active themselves or with their children.

## Safety

- Lighting is important. Work with city planners and facility managers to ensure proper lighting is installed around walkways, parks, trails, paths, sidewalks, parking lots, bus stops, hallways, stairwells, change rooms and any other places people frequent.
- Encourage city managers, homeowners and businesses to keep trails, paths, stairs and sidewalks well salted/sanded and cleared of snow to ensure they are safe and used all year long.
- Build and maintain sidewalks on streets/roadways and within shopping areas so people have a safe place to walk.
- Build more trails and paths close to residential areas where they are easy to access and regularly used. Many trails are built in lovely isolated areas but women and their families do not use them because they do not feel safe.
- Where possible avoid creating multi-use trails as motorized and human-powered activities do not mix.
- Allow more time at stop lights so that mothers with young children and strollers can make it across. Intersections should be designed with pedestrians in mind, not cars.
- Place mirrors in strategic places or design rooms with a more open concept to avoid blind or hidden corners.

## Accessibility

- Incorporate a universal design approach: doors, entrance ways, trails, paths and sidewalks are designed to handle strollers or wheelchairs; easy to use handles; accessible bathrooms with grab bars; change rooms with hooks and lockers at low heights; non-slip floors; and, showers with seats and shower chairs.
- Examine the way communities are growing. Community sprawl is not conducive to physical activity. People need to have easy access to services in their own area to encourage regular daily activity.

## Functionality

- Create inviting spaces. Walking paths with lots of benches, shade, water fountains, garbage cans, gardens and indoor spaces with plants and lots of natural light.
- Build cycling paths that actually go somewhere and don't just end at busy roads with no bike lanes. These can become transportation corridors for working mothers to add physical activity into their busy lives.
- Identify where bathrooms are on the trails and ensure they include baby changing areas. Add additional bathrooms in facilities where possible.

## Do Your Research

Conduct an audit of the built environment and upcoming urban plans in your community (trails, parks, community centres, housing developments) to identify modifications to make these areas safer, more accessible and more functional for the entire population, including mothers and their families.

## Helpful Tools

Family Friendly Community Checklist [www.familyimpactseminars.org/fi\\_checklist\\_ffc.pdf](http://www.familyimpactseminars.org/fi_checklist_ffc.pdf)

Child Safety Good Practice Guide: Good investments in unintentional child injury prevention and safety promotion [www.safekidscanada.ca/Professionals/Tools-and-Resources/Guide/Good-Practice-Guide.aspx](http://www.safekidscanada.ca/Professionals/Tools-and-Resources/Guide/Good-Practice-Guide.aspx)

Society for Children and Youth of BC – Child and Youth Friendly Communities. Various publications are available for purchase at [www.scyofbc.org/resources](http://www.scyofbc.org/resources)

Child Friendly Communities Transportation Tool Kit [www.catchcoalition.ca/Default.aspx?pagelid=1043469](http://www.catchcoalition.ca/Default.aspx?pagelid=1043469)

Making your community more child and youth friendly tool kit [www.catchcoalition.ca/resources/documents/CFC/CYFC\\_Getting\\_Started%5B1%5D%5B1%5D.pdf](http://www.catchcoalition.ca/resources/documents/CFC/CYFC_Getting_Started%5B1%5D%5B1%5D.pdf)

Why People Don't Walk and What City Planners Can do About it [www.lgc.org/freepub/community\\_design/factsheets/plan\\_to\\_walk.html](http://www.lgc.org/freepub/community_design/factsheets/plan_to_walk.html)

The Health Impacts of Urban Sprawl [www.ocfp.on.ca/local/files/Urban%20Sprawl/UrbanSprawl-Obesity.pdf](http://www.ocfp.on.ca/local/files/Urban%20Sprawl/UrbanSprawl-Obesity.pdf)

Active Living By Design Community Action Model [www.activelivingbydesign.org/our-approach/community-action-model](http://www.activelivingbydesign.org/our-approach/community-action-model)

Women's Community Safety Audit Guide [www.femmesetvilles.org/pdf-general/WISE\\_new%20safety%20audit%20guide.pdf](http://www.femmesetvilles.org/pdf-general/WISE_new%20safety%20audit%20guide.pdf)

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 For more information on CAAWS' *Mothers in Motion* project, please contact [caaws@caaws.ca](mailto:caaws@caaws.ca) or visit the website at [www.caaws.ca/mothersinmotion/e/](http://www.caaws.ca/mothersinmotion/e/).

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