

# **WHEELING WALKS**

ISN'T IT TIME YOU STARTED WALKING?

a program  
of  
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and  
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## **TRAINING MANUAL**

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# INTRODUCTION:

## ***An Overview of WHEELING WALKS***

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## Foreword

This manual provides a tool box of materials for the health educator who wants to promote increased physical activity among adults in the community. The many segments of the media-based campaign can be used together as we did in *Wheeling Walks*, or they can be used separately. From our experience, the more comprehensive the approach, the greater the impact on the community.

Our work targets only one physical activity: walking. It uses the mass media as the primary means for communicating this walking message, that, in today's world, is the most powerful means of communicating with the public. Our data also show that with the use of mass media, there are no income differential among those who hear our messages, change beliefs, attitudes, and intention, and make subsequent behavioral changes. With this method, therefore, we can impact all societal subpopulations.

We start with the US Surgeon General's recommendation for physical activity as our goal: 30 minutes or more of moderate-intensity physical activity almost every day. Then we go on to let people know that this behavior is effective for health benefit and exactly how it can be incorporated into one's everyday life. For example, most people indicate time to be the most significant barrier to regular physical activity including for walking. Our ads specifically address how this time barrier can be overcome, both through one's control beliefs ("30 minutes is just one TV program") and steps ("start out with 10 minutes, and then increase to 20, then 30").

Although any increase in physical activity can be beneficial for most individuals, targeting one particular achievable behavior works well in the public health arena. Walking is an activity that nearly everyone can do. It requires no special equipment that makes it an activity essentially available to all income levels. Furthermore, one can walk around one's home or worksite, or enjoy the wonderful trails available in so many communities all throughout the world. It all depends on the available resources and the motivation and supports.

Our campaign is primarily designed to motivate walking by individuals within their community. However, evidence for the influence of environment and policy on individual behavior is mounting steadily. For this reason, the campaign also places great emphasis on rousing community leaders to make important policy and environment changes directed at making safe and convenient walking places readily available in the local community. Our experience clearly indicates that both elements are vitally important and that such an ecological approach is highly beneficial to individuals, local communities and researchers.

The manual provides a framework for program evaluation. Two specific evaluation protocols are described, one of which (walker observations) is not particularly costly. While we realize that, for most users, extensive evaluation may be less important than helping people become active, program evaluation can be important in documenting change that will help justify initial or additional funding.

Above all, the strategies and techniques set forth here document how our campaign not only involves the local community but provides a means for the solution (walking) to be an outgrowth of the community's own identified need and directed effort. As such, our strategies incorporate methods and techniques for mobilizing local resources (organizations, media, interested individuals, health-related agencies and professionals) and for fully depending upon them for success. The methodology also all but mandates a very positive and encouraging posture on behalf of staff in relating to all in the local community. It is a posture that soon becomes down-right contagious for defeating the sedentary lifestyle enemy.

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## Mass Media-Based Campaigns --Why Advertise?

The mass media (television, radio, newspapers, magazines, billboards, etc.) are a primary source of information for the general public. In addition, mass-media advertising is a cost-effective means of sharing information with large audiences.

Health professionals are only now beginning to use these channels to promote health. Many health-communication specialists, in fact, claim that advertising alone cannot motivate people to make behavior changes (*Making Health Communication Programs Work* (1989) NCI 89-1493. National Cancer Institute, Washington, D.C.).

These health specialists suggest that media-based strategies can create awareness or interest in a health program, or reinforce a newly established behavior, but not actually change behavior. Consequently, few health education campaigns have relied on a heavy schedule of strategically-placed ads to test the ability of advertising to directly influence behavior change.

The food industry, the automotive industry, and the drug companies all believe in the power of advertising to influence the public. Furthermore, we know that advertising sells pizza, hamburgers, cars and drugs. So, why not health? Or more specifically, why not walking?

For these and other reasons, this campaign did not follow this more traditional path.

Paid advertising is the best vehicle for communicating a campaign message to large numbers of people in a short period of time. Above and beyond this, however, one also needs a well-designed, targeted message, ads bought during prime-time, and ads focus on a specific population.

As different as the concept of purchasing advertisements (ads) for a public health effort may seem, it is the major thrust of a media-based campaign. Bombarding the community with commercial ads, just like McDonalds, car dealerships and drug companies, is what makes the *WHEELING WALKS* campaign unique. **Unlike other public health campaigns that rely on public service messages placed wherever and whenever the media prefers (usually at odd hours), a serious, media-based campaign has ads specifically designed to have impact and runs them in prime time.**