

## NICE Public Health Guidance 41. Issued November 2012

### Walking and Cycling: local measures to promote walking and cycling as forms of travel or recreation.

#### What is NICE?

NICE stands for National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence.

It develops guidance and other products by working with experts from the NHS, local authorities, and others in the public, private and voluntary sectors. Its recommendations are based on the best available evidence and are produced openly and transparently.

NICE provides guidance to ensure quality and value for money to support healthcare professionals and others to make sure that the care they provide is of the best possible quality and offers the best value for money.

Guidance is for the NHS, local authorities, charities, and anyone with a responsibility for commissioning or providing healthcare, public health or social care services. NICE also supports these groups in putting guidance into practice. *Once a Guidance has been published, it is the responsibility of all groups to implement the findings, within the local context.*

#### Walking and Cycling PH41

<http://publications.nice.org.uk/walking-and-cycling-local-measures-to-promote-walking-and-cycling-as-forms-of-travel-or-recreation-ph41>

This is a very readable document and well worth reading in its original. The interesting section is only 50 pages long. The next 70 pages are devoted to references and supporting evidence. I have condensed it into an even shorter summary here.

Very clear evidence and advice is provided, with the emphasis on local rather than central governmental strategies, the latter being specifically omitted but covered in other NICE publications. It aims to set out how people can be encouraged to increase the amount they walk or cycle for travel or recreation purposes. This will help meet public health and other goals (for instance, to reduce traffic congestion, air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions). A useful collateral guidance to read is Physical Activity and the Environment, PH 8 and this is recommended reading too. <http://www.nice.org.uk/ph008>

It is aimed at all those working in physical activity promotion, parks and leisure departments and transport and local development planning sectors, and thus principally involves local authorities and local NHS agencies.

None of the statements in PH41 is in the least bit contentious; they are all glaringly obvious. However, now that this document is in the public domain, it cannot be ignored, and provides useful official evidence for lobby groups to present to local bodies when campaigning.

#### The Background

- The UK's Chief Medical Officer's recommendation for adults' level of physical activity is a minimum of 2½ hours of moderate-intensity activity spread over a week. For children, the target is at least 1 hour of vigorous activity per day.
  - *The reality is that objective data reveal that only 5% of adults and 2.5% of children achieve these targets.*
- The current levels of urban air pollution with its significant associated levels of morbidity and mortality, and of collisions cost society *£10 billion a year*; road congestion causes delays and costs the economy *£11 billion a year*.

- Increasing the time spent walking or cycling leads to evidence-based health benefits such as: reduction in obesity, stroke, heart attacks, cancer and Type 2 diabetes; healthy musculo-skeletal systems; promotion of mental well-being.
- It also helps to reduce car travel leading to less air pollution, less congestion, less road danger and less noise; making our public spaces more friendly.

## Recommendations

- **Central support** from the health sector, such as including walking and cycling in all public health pathways involving the chronic diseases mentioned above.
- **Local authorities** should ensure that walking and cycling are included in all relevant policies and plans (eg involving parks and leisure, public transport, highways, etc.) and should be integrated and coordinated with the plans of all relevant agencies, eg, Police, voluntary groups.
  - *In particular, when designing local development and transport plans, pedestrians and cyclists should be **considered before other user groups, and not just provided for as an afterthought.***
- Specific programmes to promote walking and cycling should be coordinated and cross-sector, based on a long-term vision and the wider picture, avoiding isolated, small-scale interventions.
- **Improve walking and cycling infra-structure and information** - this can include involving public transport providers; providing signage and mapping; providing free cycle safety checks and cycle-training; improving road crossings.
- **Schools** are singled out for their ability to influence children from an early age.
- **Workplaces and higher education facilities** should all have in-house walking and cycling champions and strategies.
- **Local NHS agencies** should include walking and cycling information in all relevant physical activity advice.