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Measuring the determinants of physical activity in four rural counties in New York State

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Physical inactivity increases the risk of several chronic diseases however the full range of influences on individual's physical activity behavior is not well understood. (U.S Department of Health and Human Services. HHS 2000). Steps to a HealthierNY is part of a nationwide multilevel initiative funded by the Centers for Disease Control addressing risk behaviors including physical inactivity.

The purpose of the study was to determine intrapersonal characteristics associated with adopting and maintaining regular exercise among adults 18 years and older and evaluating communitywide and environmental interventions in the four Steps counties in NYS.

Methods: Descriptive analysis of the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 Steps BRFSS (Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System) data and Process Measure Data related to physical activity.

Results: Between 75 and 81 percent of adults perceived that their community supports programs that encourage healthier lifestyles and between 42 and 47 percent knew recommended moderate physical activity levels; despite this, in all four counties less than 25 percent of adults met both the recommended moderate and vigorous physical activity levels, remaining similar in both years. The number of residents who engaged in community-wide physical activity programs remains low. To address environmental barriers, several communities implemented changes to the built environment meant to increase or improve walkability.

Conclusions: It is essential to develop systems responsive to data needs at the local level to support individual changes and community based interventions for promoting physical activity.