

# OBESITY: A GROWING PROBLEM FOR CALCASIEU

Complete Streets is one way to cut the fat



Louisiana is the nation's most obese state with 36.2% of its adults rated as such. Our state's children are not doing much better, coming in with the fourth highest rate of childhood obesity. In Lake Charles, two-thirds of the population (50,000 out of 75,000) are overweight or obese.

**T**he biggest killers in Louisiana are ailments such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes. These collectively are known as chronic diseases, meaning they are noncommunicable and slow to develop, but which are also most often caused by two preventable risks: obesity and tobacco use.

And while people may be able to tell you the personal toll these factors have taken on them, their families and their friends, they may not totally understand the impact these factors have on a wide-ranging or economic scale. Higher health insurance premiums and higher government-paid health costs affect everyone. And employers and employees suffer lost productivity, more sick days and more disability.

The Louisiana Department of Health states "Louisiana's obesity rates have skyrocketed, posting a 150 percent increase since 1990." That's a dire situation that requires solutions. Complete Streets is one.

## Complete Streets policies can improve health and business in Southwest Louisiana

When people have safe, accessible transportation options, they move around more, as well as more frequently. And evidence shows that is good for both health and business.

That's why communities around the nation are adopting Complete Streets policies, which ensure when infrastructure decisions are made and structures built, that they promote safe, accessible movement. For example, Complete Streets includes proper crossing walks, wider sidewalks, cycling lanes and medians, all of which are ideally connected to public transit. Lake Charles, with its low walkability score of 37, "car dependent city" designation, as well as its surrounding areas' health problems, make Southwest Louisiana an ideal place to enact these policies.

### Health Benefits

Complete Streets offers multiple health benefits. For example:

- Studies show active commuting, such as walking or biking, can be just as effective as structured workouts.



- Active transport has been shown to reduce cardiovascular risk 11% and improve men's mental health.

- U.S. Childhood obesity has tripled since the 1980s, while the leading cause of death for children age three to 14 are motor vehicle

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# BENEFITS OF COMPLETE STREETS GO BEYOND HEALTH

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collisions (20% while walking).

Creating a safer, more walkable and bikeable community can help reduce childhood obesity and save lives.

- Increased use of public transportation increases disposable income which can then be spent in the area.

- Air quality improves, with children and people with asthma or other respiratory diseases benefiting. One Florida county is using Complete Streets policies because of the area's high hospital admittance rates for respiratory infections and asthma, which can be directly related to air quality and car exhaust fumes.

- Physical activity improves longevity

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particularly for older adults.

## Economic Benefits

Complete Streets can also stimulate the economy, as access to healthcare, jobs and businesses are important considerations when implementing its policies.

- People can more easily seek and reach jobs, increasing employment options.

- Businesses see more foot traffic, in addition to their normal traffic.

- Real estate values increase.

Complete Streets is a win-win on many levels, as communities across the country are finding out.

## Case Studies

\* Moses Lake, WA  
This city created a Complete Streets policy in response to a 127% increase in obesity. Focus on making streets more accessible for all transport and childhood outdoor play. Read more at: [www.smartgrowthamerica.org/app/legacy/documents/cs/factsheets/cs-health.pdf](http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/app/legacy/documents/cs/factsheets/cs-health.pdf).

\* Lansing, MI  
Technical, in-depth summary of how a major city/county engaged the community to make Complete Streets a success. Read more at: <http://cedam.info/wp-content/files/Ingham-Final.pdf>

\* Manatee County, FL  
Description of Complete Streets decision-making. Focus on children, schools and parks, using existing monies to prioritize projects. Read more at: [http://www.apha.org/~media/files/pdf/factsheets/apha\\_innovfs\\_manateedept.ashx](http://www.apha.org/~media/files/pdf/factsheets/apha_innovfs_manateedept.ashx).

\* Reading, PA  
High employment rate is leading city to be more bike-friendly and accessible for low-income and unemployed. Read more at: <http://www.npr.org/2016/09/11/492230194/some-towns-treat-bikes-as-trendy-but-in-reading-pa-theyre-tools>.

