

iCANwalk Campaign Media Backgrounder

iCANwalk is a multi-partner public engagement campaign to promote walking and community walkability across Ontario. The campaign was originally created by walkON, a partnership of six former heart health sites in Central West Ontario. Thanks to a *Community Go Green* grant from the Government of Ontario, Green Communities was able to enhance the website and campaign resources, and launch iCANwalk across the province.

The purpose of iCANwalk is to: (1) raise the awareness of the general public about the importance of walkable communities so they support policy, planning and infrastructure changes that improve walkability; (2) increase the number of people choosing walking, biking and other forms of active transportation instead of driving; and (3) reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The project aims to foster a culture for walking by providing community partners with tools and resources that can be used in combination with new or on-going environmental projects, community sustainability planning, physical activity strategies, community engagement initiatives, and other active transportation projects and events.

Two key resources, the iCANwalk Pledge and the Walkability Checklist are accessible through the website and ready for use.

- The iCANwalk Pledge invites individuals to use active transportation, instead of traveling by car, for short trips over a one month period. Based on the pledge made, this interactive tool will calculate the savings in litres of gas, dollars, and greenhouse gas emissions.
- The Walkability Checklist uses four criteria to assess how walkable a community is. The checklist can be printed and taken on a neighbourhood walk, and is also functional as an on-line database to collect regional walkability data by public health unit district throughout the Province.

Other tools and resources available on the website to start a local campaign:

- print-ready posters and messages,
- an image library,
- sample radio public service announcements, in print and audio formats
- e-cards,
- the Walkability Checklist, and
- the iCANwalk Pledge.

The greenhouse gas reduction goal for the initiative is 70 tonnes over the campaign period (June 2010-Mar. 2011), which supports the Government of Ontario's commitment to address climate change through significant greenhouse gas reductions by 2020.

In order to do this, we need to get as many people as possible to take the on-line iCANwalk pledge found at www.icanwalk.ca. Everyone that completes the follow up survey to the pledge is eligible to win fabulous prizes such as urban poles, pedometers, iPod Nano and Canada Walks merchandise.

What are Walkable Communities?

Walkable communities are healthy, vibrant places where citizens rely less on their cars and choose walking more often as a form of everyday transportation.

Walkable communities are an important aspect of a healthy and vibrant community. In order to encourage citizens to rely on their cars less and choose walking more often, the environment in which they live, work, learn and play must support walking as a form of everyday transportation.

Well-designed, compact communities where people can easily and safely walk to school and work, to stores, parks and restaurants significantly reduce the need to drive. There are many environmental, health, economic and other benefits of building and sustaining a community that supports walking as a primary mode of transportation.

Why are Walkable Communities Important?

Walkable communities encourage walking by making it safe, convenient, and attractive to do so, which is important for many reasons:

- Environment – Replacing short car trips with walking can improve local air quality and can reduce greenhouse gas emissions, helping Ontarians meet climate change objectives. Epidemiological analyses indicate that as many as 8% of all non-accidental deaths in the country are related to air pollution. A short trip on foot to school by 9 families participating in a ‘walking school bus’ can reduce greenhouse gases by 1,000 kg over one year (<http://www.saferoutestoschool.ca/>).
- Health – People who live in walkable communities are 2.4 times more likely to get the required daily amount of physical activity (Healthy Weights for Healthy Kids: Report of the Standing Committee on Health, 39th Parliament, 1st session, Government of Canada). Daily physical activity results in reduced obesity levels and reduced health risks for diabetes and heart disease.
- Economy – When business districts cater to walkers instead of drivers their prosperity grows with increased foot traffic – cars don’t shop, people do. Walkable communities also have enhanced tourism potential. (Go for Green, The Business Case for Active Transportation, March 2004). When a population shift to walking occurs, health care costs associated with chronic disease are reduced as a result of the health benefits of walking.
- Fuel dependency – Oil is a limited resource. By shifting short trips from cars to walking, we decrease consumption of oil, reducing oil dependency and resulting in cost savings for families.
- Transportation demand management – Walkable communities can result in a significant modal shift from cars to walking for short trips, easing traffic congestion, reducing the need for more road infrastructure, reducing road maintenance costs, and more awareness of pedestrians by drivers thereby increasing pedestrian safety.
- Age friendly community – The Ontario population is aging. The population of seniors is expected to double in the next decade.

(<http://www.lhins.on.ca/page.aspx?id=880>). As most seniors desire to age in place, walkable communities are vital to ensure seniors can access essential services and stay socially connected. Many of the features that make a community walkable are essential elements on the World Health Organization's Checklist of Essential Features for Age Friendly Communities (http://www.who.int/ageing/publications/Age_friendly_cities_checklist.pdf)

- Community cohesion – More people walking encourages even more people to walk, increasing social interaction, lessening crime and vandalism due to more eyes on the streets, heightening the sense of community belonging, pride, and spirit (Leyden, K. Social Capital and the Built Environment: The Importance of Walkable Neighbourhoods, American Journal of Public Health 2003; 93: 1546 - 51).
- Mental health - Communities that are designed to be walkable will have residents who are more likely to know their neighbours, to participate politically, to trust others and be involved socially, which can lead to better physical and mental health (CFLRI, Making the Case for Active Transportation, Bulletin 7, Social Capital, 2009). Walking to school and other outdoor experiences can offset some of the most disturbing childhood trends which in addition to obesity, include attention disorders, and depression (<http://richardlouv.com/last-child-excerpt>).
- Happiness - Canadian sustainable transportation expert, Dr. Catherine O'Brien is working on leading-edge research that indicates sustainable transportation alternatives, like walking, promote emotional well-being and independence in children and joy and happiness in all populations. Experiencing joy and happiness can have a tremendous positive impact on mental health (<http://www.bikewalk.org/pdfs/forumarch1006footprint.pdf>).

Green Communities Canada

Green Communities Canada (GCC) is a national association of non-profit organizations that deliver innovative, practical environmental solutions to Canadian households and communities (www.greencommunitiescanada.org). Canada Walks is a department of GCC with a mission to change the current paradigm so that walkable communities become the cultural and social norm across Canada.

8-80 Cities

8-80 Cities (www.8-80cities.org) is a Canadian non-profit organization organization committed to contributing to the creation of vibrant and healthy communities that are designed for everyone – from 8 to 80 years old. 8-80 Cities works at the community level to engage diverse stakeholders in issues relating to active mobility and public spaces.

Recent and relevant articles on the benefits of walkable communities

<http://www.healthzone.ca/health/yourhealth/diabetes/article/857995--diabetes-costs-to-ontario-s-economy-staggering-report?bn=1>

<http://www.cbc.ca/health/story/2010/08/20/walk-cycle-obesity.html>

<http://www.parentcentral.ca/parent/familyhealth/article/856548--a-kid-s-eye-view-of-the-walk-to-school>