Montana Trails Rx
A Prescription for a Healthy Life

Obesity rates and diseases are soaring in the United States. Chronic conditions of pulmonary disease, heart disease, diabetes, and cancer are increasingly contributing to our nation’s health costs. These four diseases contribute to the death of over 50% of all Montanans! The simplest and most cost effective way to reverse this is by increasing the daily physical activity of all of us.

That is our goal—encouraging daily physical activity into Montanan’s lives! Since thirty minutes of physical activity a day is known to combat these chronic diseases, we encourage safe and enjoyable walking opportunities throughout Montana. Walking is the most enjoyable way to reverse obesity while putting our state and country on a path to wellness.

**Project Goal and Objectives**

To accomplish this goal, we need to recognize and increase Montana’s trails, roads and walkways. These “pathways to health” easily pay for themselves in decreased medical costs and an increase in quality of life. Our objective is to provide Health Practitioners, working with local Parks and Recreation Departments, a means to engage patients and residents in physical activity utilizing Montana’s trails, roads and walkways.

This will be achieved through the development of a model prescription program to assist healthcare providers in engaging patients and increasing their levels of physical activity through walking, running, biking, or any other recreational physical activity. As a partnership between Bike Walk Montana, MT Recreational Trails Program, the Department of Public Health & Human Services, and local Park and Recreation Departments, Trails Rx will: 1) become a model walk prescription program that can be used throughout Montana; 2) help patients recognize walking as an important and free component to improve health; and 3) increase walking opportunities for Montanans.

Prescription Trails (a.k.a. medical miles) will be identified within each pilot project area (Missoula, Billings, Helena and Bozeman) with the goal to expand this program on a statewide level. These trails will be mapped and marked so primary care physicians can prescribe trails usage for their patients.

A crucial step to encourage walking for health benefits is designated routes with appropriate signage that is easily understood as well as providing positive feedback, as described below.
**Plans & Activities to Accomplish Goals and Objectives**

Working together, we are dedicated to the development of a walk prescription program, including maps that doctors can provide to patients. The program encourages positive feedback by recording and soliciting patients’ attitudes about walking/level of activity as well as recruiting volunteers providing assistance.

**Walk Prescription Development**

Bike Walk Montana and local Parks and Recreation staff will work with clinics to develop walking prescriptions with easily understood written walking maps and goals. The clinics will manage administration of the prescriptions and specifically:

- Introduce walking prescription concept to medical providers and Care Coordinator
- Develop instructions for staff to promote “enrollment” of patients.
- Assign Care Coordinator to follow-up with each patient to assess progress at 1 month, 3 months and 6 month intervals.
- Include the prescription for walking in patient’s medical records to encourage follow-up assessment of the program.

Medical providers (MDs and NPs) will be able to write these prescriptions for appropriate patients. The medical providers will assess and note progress in patient’s medical records. This includes the original prescription as well as reinforcement throughout the period of medical oversight to include encouraging that the medical “prescription” becomes ingrained as part of a healthy life choice.

**Neighborhood Walking Routes and Map Development**

GIS Specialists will develop colorful and informational maps outlining “prescription” walking routes. Walking guides and maps can also be developed with mapping sites such as Google Maps. Maps will target routes that identify levels of difficulty and accessibility. Bike Walk MT and Parks and Recreation staff will work with volunteers to insure safety and usage prior to distribution of the maps.

**Patient Engagement**

The project will offer three levels of patient participation to include: (a) Walk prescriptions with maps provided by the medical providers, (b) Neighborhood walking groups – coordinated by Care Coordinators, and/or other volunteers, and (c) a Walk buddy system – coordinated and advertised by the Clinic’s Care Coordinator, Trail Organizations/Parks and Rec. staff and/or other volunteers.