

Community-Led Efforts to Improve Pedestrian Safety on the Rocky Boy Reservation



At a Glance

The Rocky Boy Health Center, through the CDC-funded Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) program, is working to create safer places to be physically active. Using community-driven assessments, walk audits, and culturally grounded safety messaging, the project has identified infrastructure needs, implemented immediate improvements, and building momentum for long-term transportation safety planning.



Key Public Health Challenges

Unsafe Crossings

Lacking Pedestrian Infrastructure

Limited Access to Public Transit

Speeding Traffic

According to the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, pedestrians account for 13% of motor vehicle crash deaths among American Indians in Montana, compared with 8% for all demographics statewide.

In year one, a landscape assessment found community members identified pedestrian safety as a major barrier to physical activity. Many residents rely on walking to reach schools, the wellness center, community programs, and other essential destinations, but they often encounter missing sidewalks, poor lighting, unsafe crossings, speeding traffic, and limited access to public transit. These conditions discourage walking, reduce opportunities for physical activity, and increase the risk of injury.

Approach

Through a collaborative, data-driven approach, the Rocky Boy Health Center engaged community members to identify pedestrian safety challenges and develop culturally relevant solutions that support active living and community well-being.

Rural Active Living Assessment



Community Walk Audits



Sacred Walkways Campaign

Revealed targeted improvements to frequently visited outdoor spaces could remove physical barriers and encourage walking

Community members who walked popular routes participated in walking audits that identified pain points such as missing sidewalks, poor lighting, and accessibility barriers

Staff distributed high visibility backpacks, pedestrian lights, and educational materials to community members

Approach, cont'd.

The Rocky Boy Health Center partnered with community members to ensure solutions reflected local priorities and Tribal values. The work began with a landscape assessment and Rural Active Living Assessment (RALA) to identify opportunities and barriers to physical activity. Findings showed that targeted improvements to outdoor spaces could encourage walking while building on existing community assets, including the Chippewa Cree Wellness Center, Stone Child College, the Miyo Center, and the Bear Paw Mountains.

Building on these findings, the Rocky Boy Health Center conducted walk audits with community members who frequently walk along pedestrian routes, including Box Elder Road and the corridor connecting Stone Child College to the Tribal Water Resource Department. Community members identified safety concerns such as missing sidewalks, poor lighting, unsafe crossings, accessibility barriers, and speeding vehicles.

The Rocky Boy Health Center launched the Sacred Walkways campaign to promote pedestrian safety and increase visibility for community members walking along roadways. Staff kept high-visibility backpacks in their vehicles and distributed them directly to people they saw walking so they could be more easily seen by drivers. The team also distributed pedestrian lights and adapted educational materials at community events. Additional outreach efforts, including youth activity books, podcasts, videos, and other resources reinforced pedestrian safety messages and increased awareness across the community.

"Protecting pedestrians on the roads in our community is an act of respect for our families, our ways, and our lives. Safety is a shared responsibility among drivers, walkers, and bicyclists, and every life is sacred. Choosing safe driving and safe walking honors our people and our communities. I have seen people in the community using the lights and backpacks, and I know they are making a difference. This work is important because we have experienced fatalities, and everyone deserves to be safe, even those who do not have access to a vehicle. While infrastructure improvements are underway, these are things we can do right now to help protect people. They are also raising awareness and starting important conversations about pedestrian safety in our community."

Mike Geboe, Prevention Specialist, Rocky Boy Health Center



Sustaining Success

The Rocky Boy Health Center is leveraging REACH to support long-term transportation planning through the Safe Streets and Roads for All initiative. Community partnerships, continued data collection, ongoing public engagement, and collaboration with the Western Transportation Institute, Tribal leadership, and local law enforcement will guide future investments in pedestrian infrastructure. By pairing immediate outreach and engagement with long-term planning, the community is building a safer, more walkable environment that supports physical activity and health for generations to come.

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For More Information



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