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Op-Ed | USVI Needs Infrastructure to Increase Physical Activity

Opinion / **Published On May 25, 2021 08:03 AM /**

Staff Consortium **May 25, 2021**

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One of the USVI Department of Health's initiative is to create a community that is physically active to reduce the number of residents with chronic illnesses such as hypertension, diabetes, and other chronic ailments. As the community begins preparation for hurricane season and navigates the existing pandemic, the need to remain physically active is great. An epi-study conducted by the USVI Department of Health in 2016 discovered that chronic diseases and physical inactivity are significant public health concerns in the USVI. In 2010, 1 in 3 adults in the USVI were physically inactive, which is higher than in most other states and territories. Physical activity can be supported through community and street-scale design features that promote walking where people live, work, and play. To read more of the results of the study, visit: [CDC Fact Sheet \(filesusr.com\)](https://filesusr.com).

Since then, the US Virgin Islands has made progress with the first bike lane installed on the St. Croix Bypass, the Altona Lagoon Fitness Center, beach mat access for the disabled (all three AARP initiatives), and the completion of the Veteran's Drive Pedestrian promenade in St. Thomas. After the 2017 storms, the US Virgin Islands received disaster recovery funds to assist in the reconstruction of our roadways, schools, parks, and other areas. However, additional effort is needed to establish a consistent process to show that the results of the epi-aid are considered in future planning and development projects in the US Virgin Islands.

The US Virgin Islands Department of Health is working in partnership with the USVI Department of Public Works, the USVI Office of Housing and Finance Authority, the University of the Virgin Islands, and others to increase awareness for the need to install features to create a safe environment for physical activity.

Through the USVI Walkability Institute, the USVI Department of Health has created Guiding Principles to increase physical activity in the US Virgin Islands and installed two demonstration sites, one on St. Croix and the other in St. Thomas to highlight the need for a complete streets policy and a plan for future land use. (Link to demonstration sites: USVI Walkability Institute Demonstration Projects - YouTube) The summary findings from the St. Croix Demonstration site can be accessed [here](#).

For more information on the USVI Walkability Institute and to submit your opinion on the demonstration projects in the territory, please visit www.usviwalkabilityinstitute.com. The surveys can also be accessed by scanning the QR codes below. Open the camera on your smartphone and point your camera at the code. Click the link that pops up, which will take you to the survey page. Let us do our part to increase physical activity in the territory!

Submitted Monday by Lyña E. Fredericks, Ph.D., MPH, the acting territorial director at the Division of Chronic Disease and Prevention at the U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Health. The Division of Chronic Disease and Prevention aims to provide information and resources to make it easier for people to make healthy choices. Chronic diseases are generally conditions that last 1 year or more and require ongoing medical attention or limit activities of daily living or both. Most chronic diseases can be prevented by eating well, being physically active, avoiding tobacco and excessive drinking, and getting regular health screenings.