

## Kaiser Permanente Policy Story, v2, No. 5

### Setting the Pace for the Walking Movement

Who knew something as simple as walking could stimulate such interesting dialogue about individual and population health status and spur radical change at the individual, community, and national levels? Walking and its co-benefits (Figure 1) are a concept around which many stakeholders are aligned, and it is quickly becoming a movement. “While Kaiser Permanente is advancing walking for health, our partners are interested in walking for everything from economic development to reducing carbon footprint, and this makes for a diverse and sustainable coalition,” says Tyler Norris, Vice President, Total Health Partnerships at Kaiser Permanente. However, inspiring people to walk is not enough; they need access to safe places to walk, places that provide “walkability.”

### Policy Context

As the United States struggles with obesity and other chronic conditions, walking has emerged as a highly regarded way of increasing physical activity. Strategies for promoting walking include the *Every Body Walk!* campaign and collaborative—powered by Kaiser Permanente and over 100 partners—and the Surgeon General’s Call to Action on Walking, which seeks a multi-sector approach to get all Americans walking daily. A 2013 National Walking Summit hosted by Kaiser Permanente provided an opportunity to learn and innovate across sectors. Many thought leaders recognize that “walkability” is a central part of any policy development to encourage walking. We can support demand for walking by giving people access to safe, walkable places.

**Figure 1: Complementay Benefits (co-benefits)**



### The Challenge

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American College of Sports Medicine, and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend that adults get 30 minutes per day of moderate to vigorous physical activity at least five days per week and that children get 60 minutes every day. However, barriers to achieving these goals include those that are self-imposed as well as environmental. A focus on increasing the number of people who want to walk is vital, but it is equally important to increase walkability—particularly in communities where there are safety concerns, and for populations with higher disease burden.

### Kaiser Permanente Solution

Over the past three years, Kaiser Permanente has rolled out walking programs for employees, school-aged children, and adults.

*Every Body Walk!* builds awareness about the health benefits of walking through a web-based portal that provides resources on walking, video clips, walking maps, and links to walking groups and pedestrian advocacy organizations. Over the past year, *Every*

*Body Walk!* has scaled to become a multi-sector collaborative, in which partners engage their constituents in implementing strategies to increase walking and walkability. *Every Body Walk!* and Kaiser Permanente released *The Walking Revolution*, an inspiring video about the benefits of physical activity. Americans can help make walking “go viral” by sharing the video with friends, family, coworkers and community members. Check out [www.everybodywalk.org](http://www.everybodywalk.org) and the *Every Body Walk!* mobile app, with over 200,000 downloads.

“I walk twice a week at 6 a.m. with my Kaiser Permanente colleagues,” says Jennifer Liebermann, Director, Garfield Health Care Innovation Center. “I have standing one-on-one walking meetings with my team, which can lead to more expansive conversations, especially when floating new ideas around.”

*KP Walk!* promotes walking among Kaiser Permanente’s workforce. It uses interactive virtual walking trails to encourage employees and physicians to meet individual goals. As an employer, Kaiser Permanente recognizes that walking improves workforce productivity—it increases energy, decreases absences, and has the potential to keep people healthy. Since its launch in January 2011, over 43,000 employees have registered. *KP Walk!* also promotes the use of walking meetings.

*Exercise as a Vital Sign* (EVS) was launched four years ago to encourage conversations between our providers and patients about physical activity and health. At each clinical encounter, doctors ask patients: (1) On average, how many days per week do you engage in moderate or greater physical activity (like a brisk walk)? And, (2) On those days, how many minutes do you engage in activity at this level? This information is entered into the electronic medical record and revisited at each subsequent encounter. The goal of EVS is for physicians to personalize the health benefits of



walking and deliver that message in the context of the provider-patient relationship. Exercise as a Vital Sign is now being implemented in all KP regions.

*Fire Up Your Feet* is a core program of the Safe Routes to School National Partnership, available to any elementary and middle school (grades K-8) nationally. Made possible in partnership with Kaiser Permanente, this program offers free resources, an online activity tracker, a school fundraising organizer, and more, all aimed at increasing physical activity before, during, and after school for students, parents, school staff, and teachers. Visit [fireupyourfeet.org](http://fireupyourfeet.org).

## Moving Forward

What is the future of the walking movement? Will we see an increase in the number of walking meetings? Will Hollywood build walking into popular shows and movies? Will we see an explosion of technology, sensors, and mobile apps that encourage individuals to take up walking as their form of exercise and enter an online community of like-minded individuals? Will physicians begin routinely prescribing walking and other exercise as medicine?

Merging fitness with health care yields tremendous benefits. Walking contributes to mental, spiritual, physical and social well-being; those who maintain an active lifestyle live longer, healthier lives. In the words of one of our physician champions for exercise and walking, Bob Sallis, “If walking were a drug, it would be flying off the shelves.”

*For more information, please contact:*  
Kaiser Permanente Institute for Health Policy at <http://www.kp.org/ihp>