

# ACSM American Fitness Index™ Background

The ACSM American Fitness Index™ (AFI) (<http://www.americanfitnessindex.org/report.htm>) program is designed to help improve the health, fitness, and quality of life of Americans by promoting physical activity. The program is an evidence- and science-based measurement of the state of health and fitness at the community level throughout the U.S.<sup>1</sup>

Research studies tell us that the majority of adults in the United States (54.1%) do not engage in enough physical activity. Inactivity doubles the risk of developing heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and obesity. Physical inactivity also has staggering economic consequences. The annual cost directly attributable to inactivity in the U.S. is an estimated \$24–76 billion. The good news is that modest increases in physical activity have the potential to produce substantial health benefits. Population-based interventions to promote health and prevent disease have provided strong evidence that public health efforts can successfully increase physical activity.<sup>2</sup>

AFI can help city planners, policy makers and health educators understand how the health of the city and its residents and community assets support active, healthy lifestyles compared to other cities nationwide. While the AFI only looked at data from the 50 largest metropolitan areas in the United States, the information can help all communities address the health of their residents. The AFI data report addresses several preventive health behaviors, levels of chronic disease conditions, and health care access, as well as community resources and policies that support physical activity. In addition, demographic and economic diversity, and levels of violent crime are shown for selected metropolitan areas to help increase the understanding of the unique attributes of each city.

AFI program components include:

- ◆ **Aggregated data related to healthy lifestyles, health outcomes, and community resources;**
- ◆ **Resources for practical application of sports medicine and exercise science at the community level; and**
- ◆ **Support to health promotion partners by linking communities with organizations and existing programs in their metro areas; promoting collaboration on physical activity and healthy lifestyle initiatives; and connecting local, state and national partners and resources.**

In May 2008, the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) released the pilot ACSM American Fitness Index™ data report. In January 2009, the first full version of AFI data report was released. Health indicators including the percentage of people who exercise regularly, maintain a healthy weight, eat the recommended daily servings of fruits and vegetables, have access to health care, have health insurance, and don't smoke were included in the report. Environmental factors included the availability of parks, walking/bike trails, and public transportation.

<sup>1</sup> ACSM American Fitness Index™: *Actively Moving U.S. Cities to Better Health*. 2008 Edition. American College of Sports Medicine. [www.acsm.org](http://www.acsm.org).

<sup>2</sup> Roux L. et. al. Cost Effectiveness of Community-Based Physical Activity Interventions. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. 35:6 (578-588) Dec. 2008.