

**INSERT TITLE/COVER PAGE**  
**The Island County Plan for Healthy Living**

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**Part I:  
Vision in Context**

## Introduction: The Background

The Washington State Department of Health published the State's Nutrition and Physical Activity Plan in June 2003 to address the public health concern of an inactive and overweight population. The goal of the plan is to present "a framework that can be used to make healthy living easier for all of us." The core idea of the plan is to "promote nutrition and physical activity simultaneously at several levels – for individuals, for families, within institutions and organizations, in communities, and through public policy." The Island County Plan for Healthy Living was developed with the same goal and core theme.

Planning for Island County has some unique challenges. Most residents live on the islands of Whidbey and Camano, which have no direct physical connection and, which therefore, have limited interaction at a community or individual level even though they share a county government. Whidbey Island itself has three distinct regions tied to the school district boundaries, each of which has a different flavor and demographic make-up. (More information about the geography, demography and health status of Island County can be found in Appendix A.) During the planning process, the planning team looked for strategies that would apply across the County as well as, to the specific needs of these different Islands and their communities.

The Island County Plan described in the following report uses the State's Plan as a starting point, but looks specifically at the priorities and needs of Island County residents. Information for the plan was developed by:

- Reviewing literature from national and state plans and models for reducing the number of overweight individuals and increasing physical activity.
- Interviewing key informants and stakeholders from each region of Island County representing a wide array of stakeholders with particular interest in physical activity and nutrition-related issues.
- Carrying out a public web-based survey to assess the needs and priorities of residents.

With the State Plan as a guiding framework, a team from the Island County Health Department and Strategic Learning Resources Inc.<sup>1</sup> worked to analyze the information gathered and from it, cull specific recommendations for the future.

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<sup>1</sup> SLR was retained by Island County Health Department (ICHD) to develop the plan using community-based approaches. SLR found that the large geographic area of Island County and the distinct communities made it difficult to develop an effective coalition to create the plan. SLR and ICHD staff, working together, decided to substitute the use of interviews and the public survey as a means of hearing from different types of stakeholders.

## Visions for Island County

When stakeholders were asked to describe in concrete terms their vision for a healthy Island County of the future, they generated a diverse, creative array of images, out of which emerged some important themes. Overall, the stakeholders imagined a future in which physical activity was directly and explicitly linked to the core factors, which distinguish Island County as a special place to live.

### *Walking and Biking*



One stakeholder used the phrase “walking scale is human scale” and this link between walking and quality of life was a recurring theme for stakeholders from every region of Island county. Many described a future in which citizen involvement in preserving, mapping, planning, and developing sidewalks, trails, and pathways yielded both a greater ability to get from point a to point b without getting in a car and an ongoing sense of connectedness to the land and to each other.

Whidbey Island stakeholders saw a future in which networks of biking and walking trails had health and social benefits for residents, and also broad economic benefits by boosting tourism as Whidbey Island becomes known as a premiere destination for walking and biking vacations.

### *Access to Healthy Foods*



In the ideal future, stakeholders said, healthy foods are conveniently available to everyone, regardless of income, and there are ample opportunities to expand one’s knowledge of quick and easy ways to prepare healthful foods.

The rural history of Island County was an important value to respondents, many of whom saw a future in which small farms are supported, open spaces are preserved, and community feeling is nurtured via outreach to potentially marginalized groups like seniors, new moms, people with low incomes, and young kids. In this vision, local food sources and farms become an important part of the healthy diets of all residents.

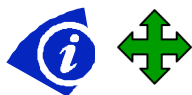
### *Active Children with Healthy Diets*



Stakeholders overwhelmingly envisioned a future in which kids are more physically active both in and outside of school environments. They saw a future in which families are well educated about the connections between nutrition, activity, sleep and successful learning; in which readily available scholarships eliminate any financial barriers preventing kids from participating in activities of their choice; and in which kids have regular access to fresh foods.

While many respondents believed that breastfeeding issues were not a high priority for focused attention, those working most closely with new mothers envisioned higher levels of employer support for breast pumping at work, and more consistent support of breastfeeding by local health care providers.

*Choice and  
Information*



The natural beauty of the islands of Island County was seen as a clear asset to cherish and preserve; but many also noted that rain falls on that natural beauty for many months of the year. Numerous portraits of the ideal future included affordable and accessible indoor recreation options for people of all ages, including at the workplace.

Finally, stakeholders envisioned communities in which information about the wide variety of available activity options and resources to support healthy living are easily accessible with the click of a mouse.

Taken together, these themes form a compelling vision for Island County, one which takes advantage of unique historical and geographic assets in order to support vibrant, active lifestyles for people of all ages. The following comprehensive plan for healthy living in Island County emerged from efforts to discern just what kinds of actions might most effectively turn these imagined futures into realities.

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**Part II:  
Review of Existing  
Nutrition and Physical  
Activity Policies and  
Programs in Island County**

**Strong Foundations**

A number of programs and policies designed to make physical activity and good nutrition easy for all residents to achieve are already in place in Island County. The following matrices offer a number of examples of the kinds of current efforts, which form a strong foundation on which future policies and programs can be built. (It should be noted that these examples are organized by the goals and objectives delineated in the State plan, which formed the context for the Island County Plan.)

**High Impact Emerging Developments**

Four emerging developments are also worth highlighting as they may have particularly high impact on the future of Island County residents with respect to physical activity and nutrition.

*Trail Plan*

In January 2006, Island County Public Works will publish a comprehensive non-motorized trail plan, which will propose priorities for trail projects for each of the regions of Island County. The priority proposals were developed through a rigorous community engagement process. It seems likely that community groups with interest in walkability and trail development will be able to use this plan to help focus their efforts and policy makers will have a resource to help guide their fundraising and development processes.

*South Whidbey Parks & Recreation Master Plan*

The South Whidbey Parks and Recreation District is soon embarking on a Master Planning project. Early response to a community needs assessment survey seems to indicate strong support for a community pool and a wide variety of other indoor athletic offerings.

*Physical Activity Coalition Funding Ended*

The three-year funding period for the Physical Activity Coalition, which supported both WHIM (Whidbey in Motion) and the Camano Neighborhood Walkers, ended in December 2005. Both groups were highly effective in supporting community fitness through the formation of walking groups, the development of educational materials, and direct outreach to schools and other community settings. The current challenge will be to sustain the momentum generated by these committed coalition groups in the absence of continued funding from Regence Blueshield.

*New requirements For schools*

Another clear area of high impact is the recent statutory requirement that each school district re-visit their physical activity and nutrition guidelines. The four school districts in Island County have taken important stands by establishing minimum nutrition standards for contents of vending machines and school lunches, and by beginning to work toward integrating more physical activity into school curricula for grades K-12. These new policies alone, however, will not accomplish the desired vision for children's health described by both key informants and survey respondents.