

Where We Live Matters

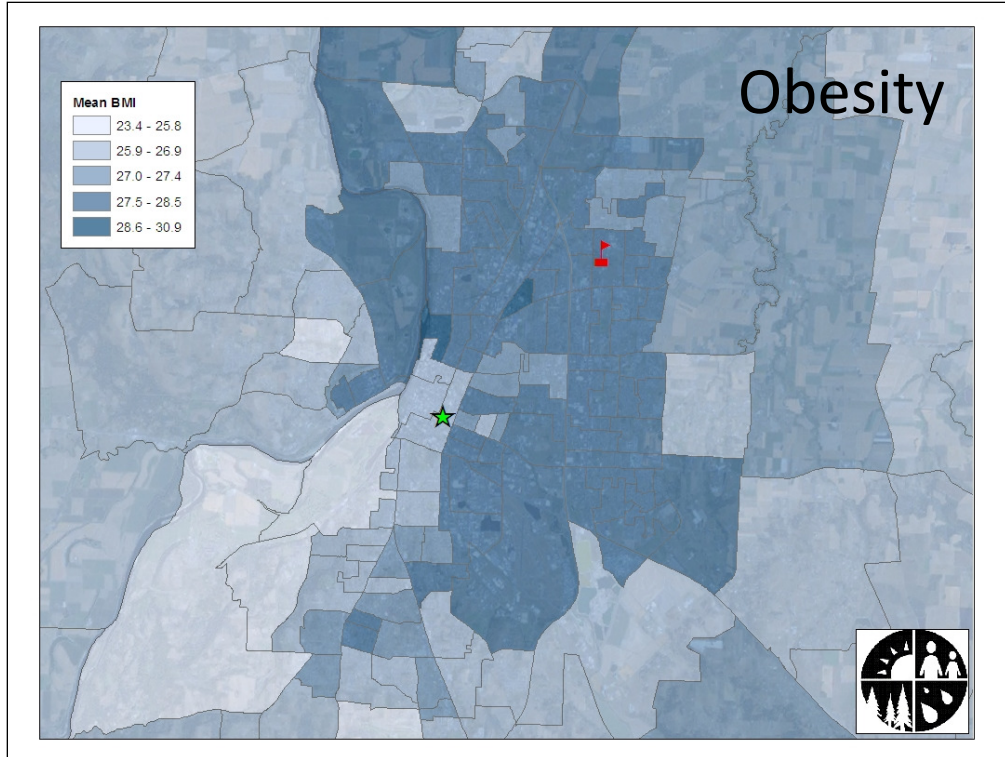
Creating Healthy Neighborhoods

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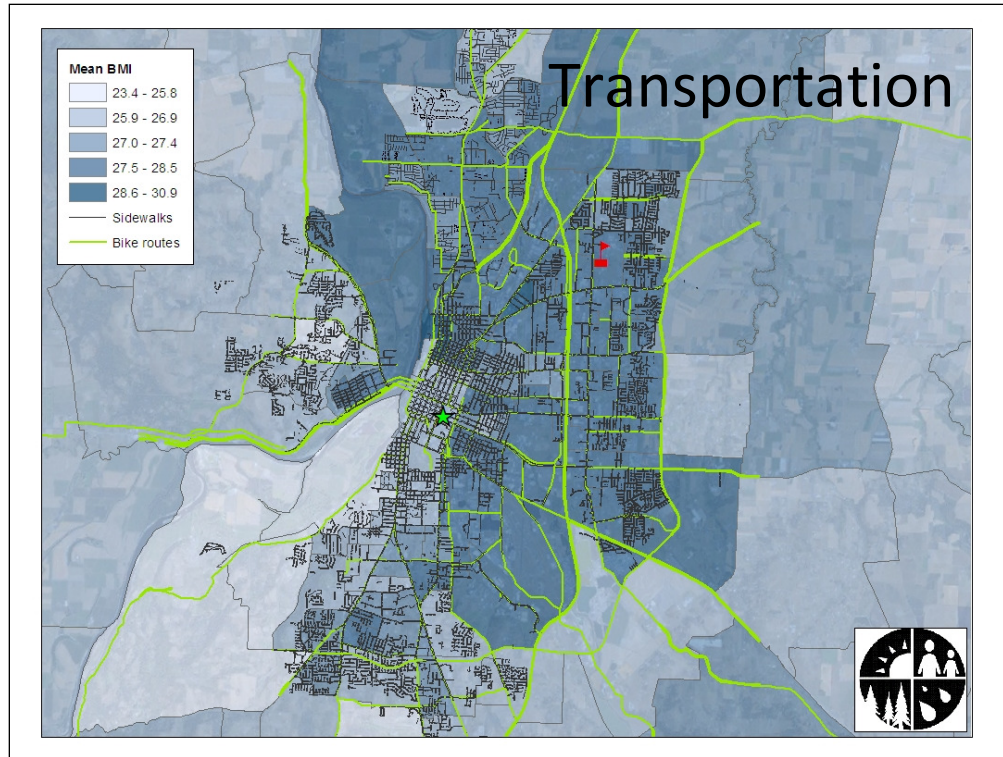


I was asked to talk today about how our environment is promoting obesity, and some of the ways people are looking to make changes. I think we all understand that in general, obesity is the result of too much eating and not enough physical activity. Because obesity is so related to these behaviors, I think it's often easy to overlook the influence of the environment. But our neighborhoods, and work places, and schools have a big influence on our behaviors, in part by restricting the options that are available to us. But collectively we can take steps to shape our environment to make it easier to be healthy.

I'm going to be showing some maps of the Salem-Keizer area, and for reference the green star is the capitol building and the red flag is Chemeketa Community College.



This is a map of the population's weight in the Salem-Keizer area. These data come from driver's licenses- the lighter colored areas have lower average body mass index, which is the standard proxy measure for obesity. The darker areas on the map have heavier people. In most cities and towns in Oregon the average weight is greater in the city than in the surrounding country.

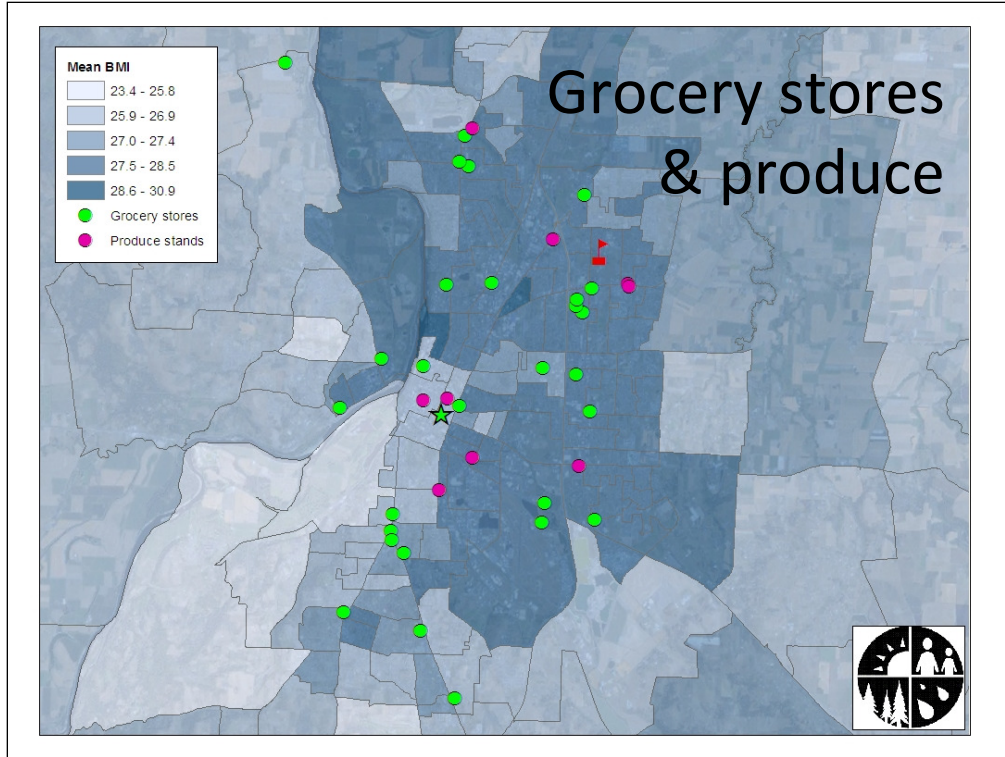


The green lines on this map are bike routes, and the black lines are sidewalks. You can see there's a grid in the downtown area, but sidewalks are more sparse in other parts of the city.

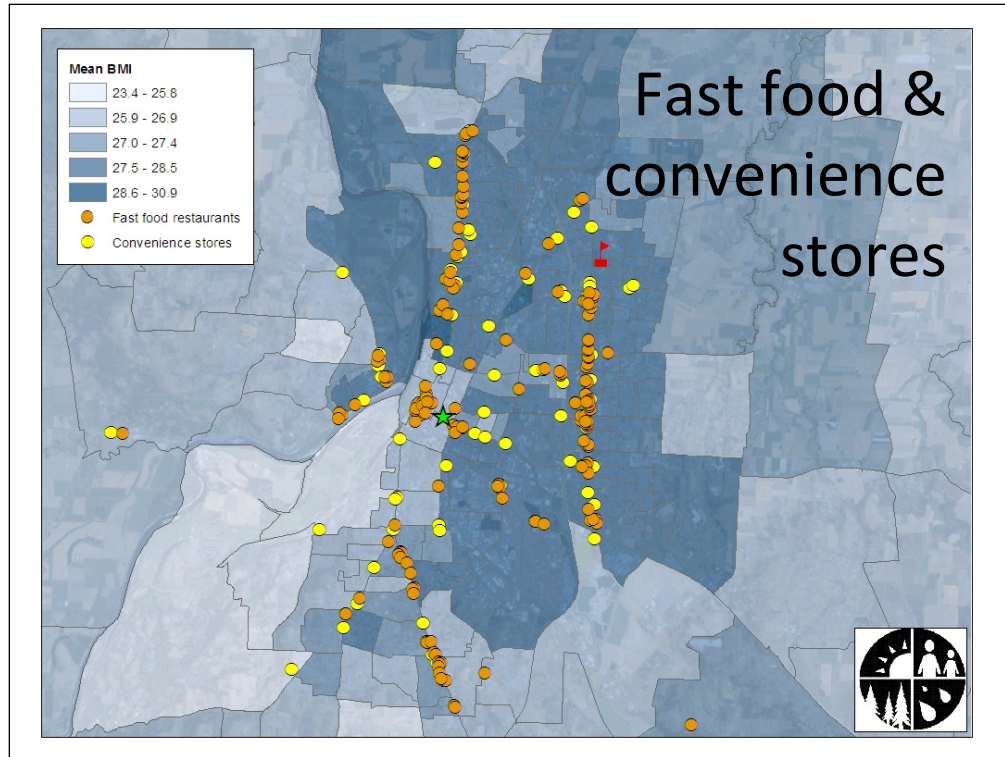
Almost half of the adults living in Oregon aren't meeting minimum recommendations for physical activity, which is to do moderate activities like walking, biking, or vacuuming for 30 minutes five days a week. I want to make the distinction between physical activity and exercise- it's great if you have the time and the ability to get to a gym or to go for a run around the neighborhood, but we live busy lives and it can be hard to find the time for that stuff. What would be better is if people are able to incorporate physical activity into their daily routines. Most of us have jobs where we're not that active, sitting or standing all day. And most people drive to work or the store instead of walking or biking. The risk of obesity goes up by 6% for every hour per day spent in a car, but we've built communities that really make it hard for people to live there without a car, because houses may be far from grocery stores, schools, or work places.

So if we want to promote physical activity, I think we generally have to do three things.

1. Make sure there are things nearby to walk or bike to, like farmer's markets, community gardens, parks, coffeeshops, or community centers. Farmers markets and community gardens are things that community members can organize. When you're looking for a location for a new school, put it within walking distance of the population it is going to serve, and make sure there are safe routes for kids to walk and bike there. Choosing the location of new parks, schools or libraries are bigger projects but there are ways to get involved in those discussions. Cities can use zoning decisions and tax incentives to encourage neighborhood businesses to open.
2. Make sure there are safe routes for walking and biking. Put in street lights and sidewalks. Create cross-walks across busy streets so people won't have to walk so far to find a safe place to cross. Paint bike lanes and fill in potholes to make it safer to ride. Install bike racks. Put in traffic calming measures to slow down car traffic. Cities and counties have budgets for transportation projects, and citizens can encourage policymakers to spend some of those dollars promoting active transportation, not just making it easy for cars.
3. Make walking and biking more pleasant by sprucing up the neighborhood. Plant trees and gardens in empty lots. Paint murals on windowless buildings. Have neighborhood cleanup days.



The other side of the obesity equation is food. To prevent and reduce obesity people need to eat more healthy food and eat less unhealthy food. On this map the green dots are grocery stores and the purple ones are farm stands and farmers markets, so these are places that sell fresh fruits and vegetables.



This map shows fast food restaurants in orange and convenience stores in yellow, and these are places that typically sell a pretty unhealthy mix of products. In your average convenience store, and this includes gas station markets, cigarettes, bottled soft drinks and beer make up more than half the sales. Perishable foods like bread, fruits and vegetables together make up less than 1% of convenience store sales.

So the point is that it's much easier to get to unhealthy food than it is to get to healthy stuff. Some communities are trying to improve access to healthy foods by starting farmer's markets and community gardens, and by working to get healthier options in convenience stores. Some of this will require investment, for refrigeration equipment for fresh produce, for example. I think it can help to look at these maps and think about what areas would most benefit from having greater access to healthy options.

So with that I'm going to turn it over to Kelly and we'll watch the Weight of the Nation

This slide was added by
Marion County Health Department

You can watch the Weight of the Nation series
for free at:

- <http://theweightofthenation.hbo.com/films/>