

AICR's Federal Priorities: Physical Activity

Background

The mission of the [American Institute for Cancer Research \(AICR\)](#) is to create a world free of preventable cancers by championing research on cancer prevention and survival through healthy lifestyles. An important piece of a healthy lifestyle is physical activity, whether it is exercising, walking, dancing, or movement in other daily activities. AICR's *Third Expert Report* concludes that being physically active and exercising can lower the risk for cancer and numerous other chronic.¹ Specifically, "studies show that regular physical activity helps to support a healthy immune system, reduces chronic inflammation, and helps [the] body maintain healthy levels of hormones like insulin and estrogen," decreasing the risk of breast, colorectal, and endometrial cancer.²

Despite the benefits of physical activity for cancer prevention and survival, physical inactivity remains a challenge in the U.S. Approximately \$117 billion is spent in health care costs each year due to physical inactivity,³ and data from the 2018 National Health Interview Survey shows that only 53.3% of adults aged 18 and over met the *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans* for aerobic physical activity.⁴ **To address these challenges, AICR advocates for regular updates to federal physical activity guidelines, physical activity in all policies, and promoting physical activity through the health care system.**

Physical Activity Alliance

AICR is a founding member of the [Physical Activity Alliance \(PAA\)](#), a national coalition of diverse partners including research organizations, professional associations, medical societies, and sports industry organizations. PAA works to "lead efforts to create, support, and advocate policy and system changes that enable all Americans to enjoy physically active lives."⁵ AICR collaborates with PAA to advance its physical activity policy agenda and participates in PAA activities, such as the annual Congressional Physical Activity Challenge.

Physical Activity Guidelines

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) issued the first [Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans \(PAG\)](#) in 2008, and updated guidelines were published in 2018.⁶ These guidelines provide physical activity recommendations for children and adolescents, adults, older adults, women during and after pregnancy, individuals with disabilities and individuals with chronic health conditions. The overarching guidelines for adults to move more

¹ World Cancer Research Fund/American Institute for Cancer Research. *Diet, Nutrition, Physical Activity and Cancer: a Global Perspective*. Continuous Update Project Expert Report 2018. Available at dietandcancerreport.org.

² American Institute for Cancer Research. *Recommendation: Be Physically Active*. <https://www.aicr.org/cancer-prevention/recommendations/be-physically-active/#what-the-science-says>

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Physical Activity Builds a Health and Strong America*. July 13, 2022. <https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/about-physical-activity/index.html>

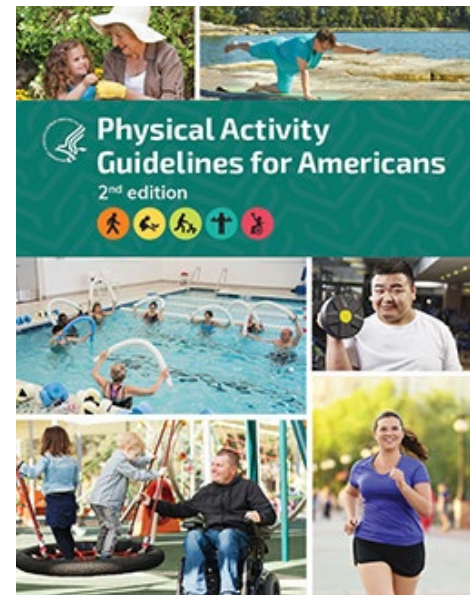
⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Exercise or Physical Activity*. National Center for Health Statistics. June 11, 2021. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/exercise.htm>

⁵ Physical Activity Alliance. *About Us*. 2020. <https://paamovewithus.org/about-paa/>

⁶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*, 2nd edition. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2018. Available at <https://www.hhs.gov/fitness/be-active/physical-activity-guidelines-for-americans/index.html>.

and sit less and engage in at least 150 minutes of moderate physical activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity per week are consistent with AICR's [10 Recommendations for Cancer Prevention](#).

The most recent version of the PAG, published in 2018, included cancer experts as part of the advisory committee, and the guidelines list the benefits of an active lifestyle for cancer prevention and survivorship. However, unlike other federal guidelines, such as the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, that are required by law to be updated every five years, no law currently exists for the PAG. **AICR has endorsed [H.R. 2094, the Promoting Physical Activity for Americans Act](#), which instructs HHS to provide physical activity guidelines for the general public based on peer-reviewed evidence at least every ten years.** AICR will continue to monitor and advocate for legislation ensuring physical activity recommendations are current and based on the most authoritative evidence.



Physical Activity Assessment, Prescription, and Referral

Physical activity is important for prevention and treatment of many chronic diseases, including cancer, but physical activity is often not discussed in health care encounters as part of standard care.⁷ PAA is working on a multi-year “It’s Time to Move” initiative, focused on policy and systems changes to empower health care providers to seamlessly integrate physical activity clinical measures into patient care plans and help make physical activity prescriptions a standard of care for all people living in the U.S. This goal requires implementation of a comprehensive strategy, including increasing insurance coverage and reimbursement for physical activity assessment, prescription, and referral; identifying gaps in providers who can bill for the services and billing codes; and conducting and elevating relevant research.⁸

Physical Activity in All Policies

AICR advocates for a range of policies that elevate physical activity as a priority across sectors and agencies. For example, AICR [advocates](#) for robust funding at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Cancer Institute (NCI), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that can support physical activity research and interventions. Additionally, we support efforts to bring physical activity to the national forefront, such as the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health. As a [conference pillar](#) focuses on physical activity, we submitted [comments](#) to inform conference leaders on how the federal government can support policies that promote physical activity for cancer prevention and survivorship. Finally, PAA's [National Physical Activity Plan](#) outlines policies and programs to increase physical activity for Americans.

⁷ Whitsel LP, Bantham A, Jarrin R, Sanders L, Stoutenberg M. Physical activity assessment, prescription and referral in US healthcare: How do we make this a standard of clinical practice?. *Prog Cardiovasc Dis.* 2021;64:88-95. doi:10.1016/j.pcad.2020.12.006

⁸ Ibid.

Moving Through Cancer

To promote physical activity for those who have experienced a cancer diagnosis, AICR supports [Moving Through Cancer](#), an initiative led by the American College of Sports Medicine that aims to make exercise part of the standard of care in oncology by 2029. AICR is engaged in developing a policy agenda focused on increasing access to and insurance coverage for exercise oncology interventions.⁹

Conclusion

Physical activity is essential for cancer prevention and survival. Federal policies can make it easier for Americans to lead a healthy lifestyle, and AICR continues to work with PAA and other organizations to promote physical activity.

For more information about AICR's federal policy priorities and how you can get involved, please visit <https://www.aicr.org/impact/policy-advocacy> or contact advocacy@aicr.org.

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⁹ Schmitz, Kathryn H. et al, "Moving through Cancer: Setting the Agenda to Make Exercise Standard in Oncology Practice." *Cancer* 127, no. 3 (2020): 476–84. doi: 10.1002/cncr.33245.