

# Alabama Providers Prescribe Physical Activity Via the Parks Rx Program

Susan Driggers

## At A Glance

As of May 2017, 7,360 residents in Birmingham, AL, were prescribed physical activity to improve their health. The University of Alabama Birmingham's (UAB's) Minority Health & Health Disparities Research Center teamed up with 23 health care providers to pilot "Parks Rx" at a local health department. With Parks Rx, patients are prescribed physical activity and linked to online resources where they can find more than 140 local parks to get active. More than 25,000 patients at the health department have access to the program's online resources.



## Public Health Challenge

Alabama has the second highest rate of adult obesity in the nation, according to 2015 data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The state's rates of type 2 diabetes and deaths from heart disease and cancer are also higher than the national average. Physical activity can help reduce the risks of these chronic conditions. Yet, nearly 32% of Alabama

adults surveyed reported no leisure-time physical activity in 2015. Creating or improving access to parks, trails, and bike paths can increase physical activity, according to the Community Preventive Services Task Force. Parks Rx connects Birmingham residents with nearby parks to get them moving to improve their health.

## Find Out More

Visit Parks Rx at [www.reachforbetterhealth.com/parksrx](http://www.reachforbetterhealth.com/parksrx) to see how Birmingham connects people and parks. Birmingham residents can find more information at an interactive Parks Rx kiosk in the Jefferson County Department of Health. Providers can download Parks Rx adult and pediatric prescriptions from the website. This program is supported by CDC's Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health cooperative agreement. For more information on Alabama's health data, visit [www.cdc.gov/cdi](http://www.cdc.gov/cdi)

*We are leaving footprints to better health in the community. The evidence of our work can help everyone become more physically active. We want our efforts to be sustainable for many years to come.*

- Dr. Mona Fouad, Director,  
Division of Preventive  
Medicine, UAB

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### Approach

Parks Rx promotes a unique patient-provider relationship where providers talk with patients about how to get active and use neighborhood parks to do fun physical activities. Using Parks Rx pads (available in both Spanish and English), providers prescribe physical activity to their patients and direct them to the Parks Rx website. The website includes an interactive map where patients can search by zip code to find more than 140 local parks and green spaces for physical activity. The website also provides information on park amenities, safety, trail length, and hours of operation. To reinforce healthy living messages, brightly colored Parks Rx signs were installed at nine city parks.

### Results

From July 2016 to May 2017, 23 providers prescribed “exercise as medicine” for 7,360 adults and children and directed them to online Parks Rx resources for physical activity. Parks Rx has also expanded to UAB’s Breast Health Clinic, where providers share the program with cancer patients and their families. And, on October 4, 2016, a local news station featured a story about Parks Rx which helped to increase website visitors dramatically (from 3 to 38 unique users) in one day. Additionally, the National Land Trust Alliance and Birmingham’s Freshwater Land Trust (both UAB partners) plan to use Parks Rx as an example of how land trusts can help set up similar programs to promote physical activity. Parks Rx also received national attention from conservation and health partners who recognized the program’s early success.

### What's Next

UAB’s Minority Health & Health Disparities Research Center will continue to establish partnerships with local organizations to help sustain Parks Rx. Already, Freshwater Land Trust has secured additional funding to help sustain and expand the program across Jefferson County. With this funding, hundreds of parks will be added to Parks Rx so that residents can easily find safe and convenient places to be active outdoors. Parks Rx also links to the Red Rock Ridge & Valley Trail System, Birmingham’s master plan that connects parks with proposed trails to create a network of greenways for physical activity.