

What factors affect the passage of state legislation to prevent childhood obesity?



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Active Living Research
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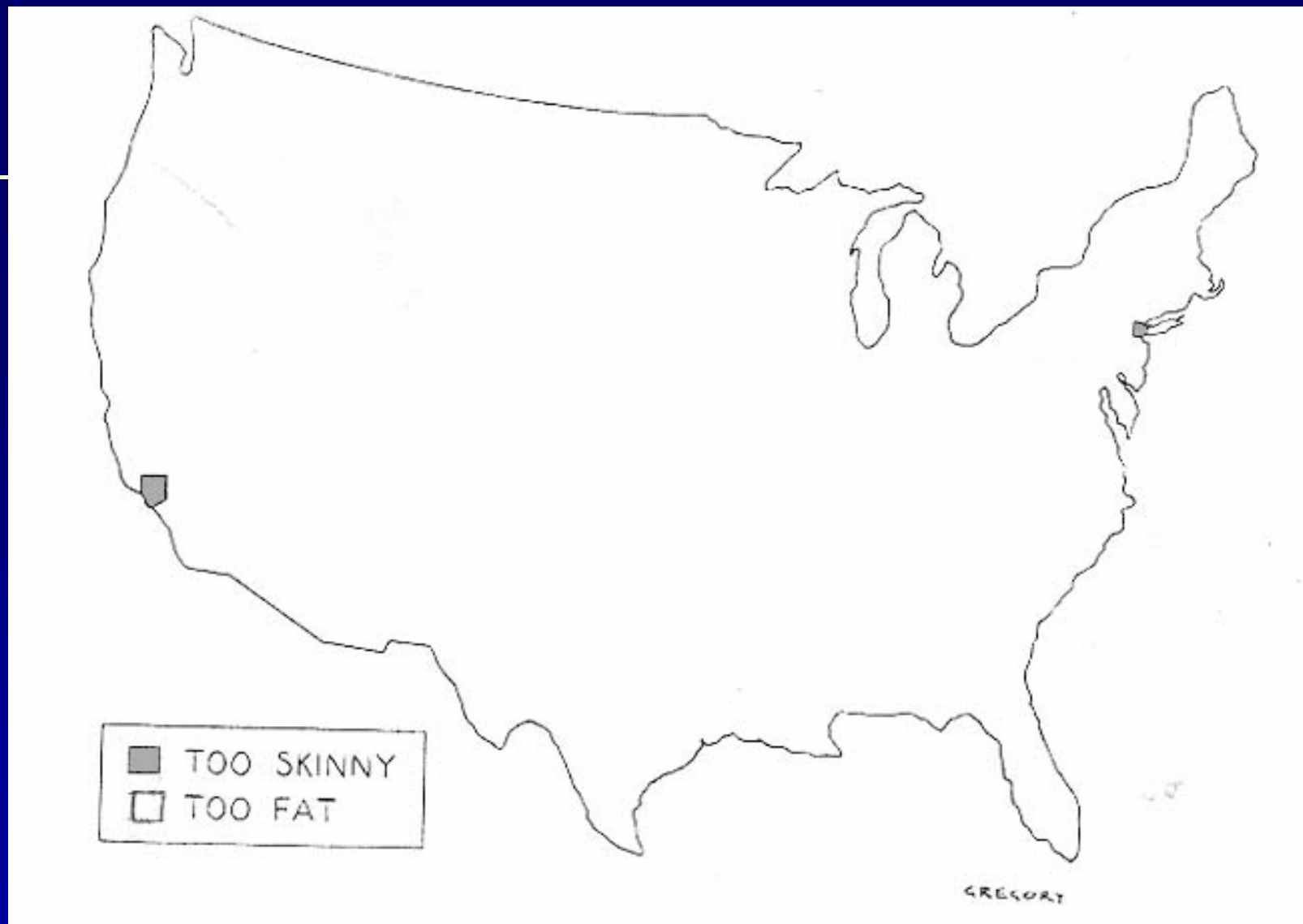
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Presentation Objectives

- Background
- Study purpose
- Review Phases I and II
- Phase III
- So what?

Background

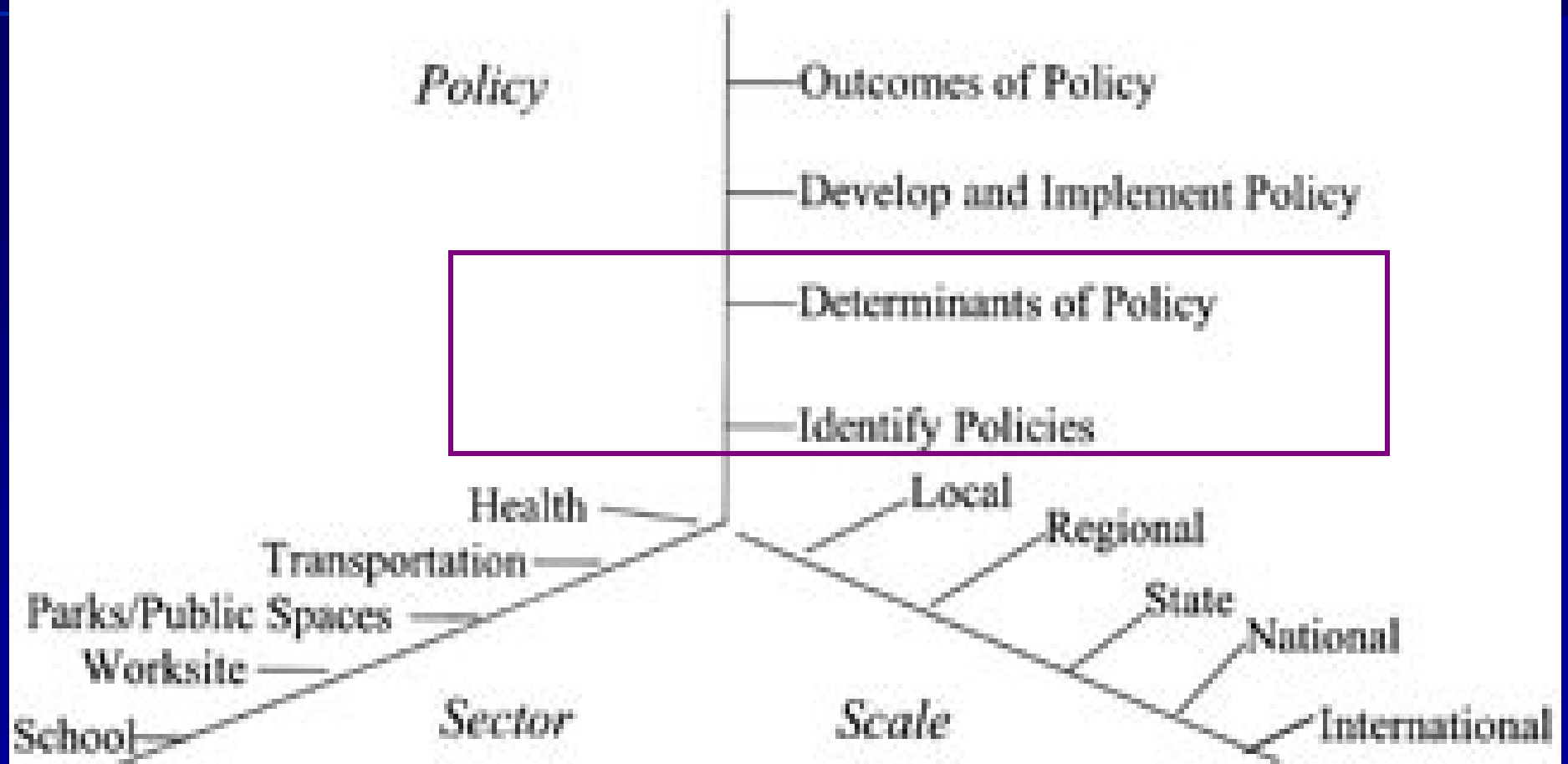
- Childhood obesity epidemic
- Environmental and policy interventions
- Individual states have much of the authority over public health policy



Why policy interventions?

- Aimed at changing the physical and sociopolitical environments
- Designed to provide opportunities, support, and cues to help people develop healthier behaviors
- May directly affect behaviors
 - Influence of price of tobacco on consumption
- Or may alter social norms
 - Physically active people in public spaces
- Often more permanent than many public health programs focused on individual-level behavioral change
 - Important complement to individual-level programs

Physical Activity Policy Framework



Schmid, Pratt, and Witmer. *J Physical Activity Health* 2006.

COPS: Childhood Obesity Policy Study

Study Objective: To examine childhood obesity prevention legislation in all 50 states, 2003-2005

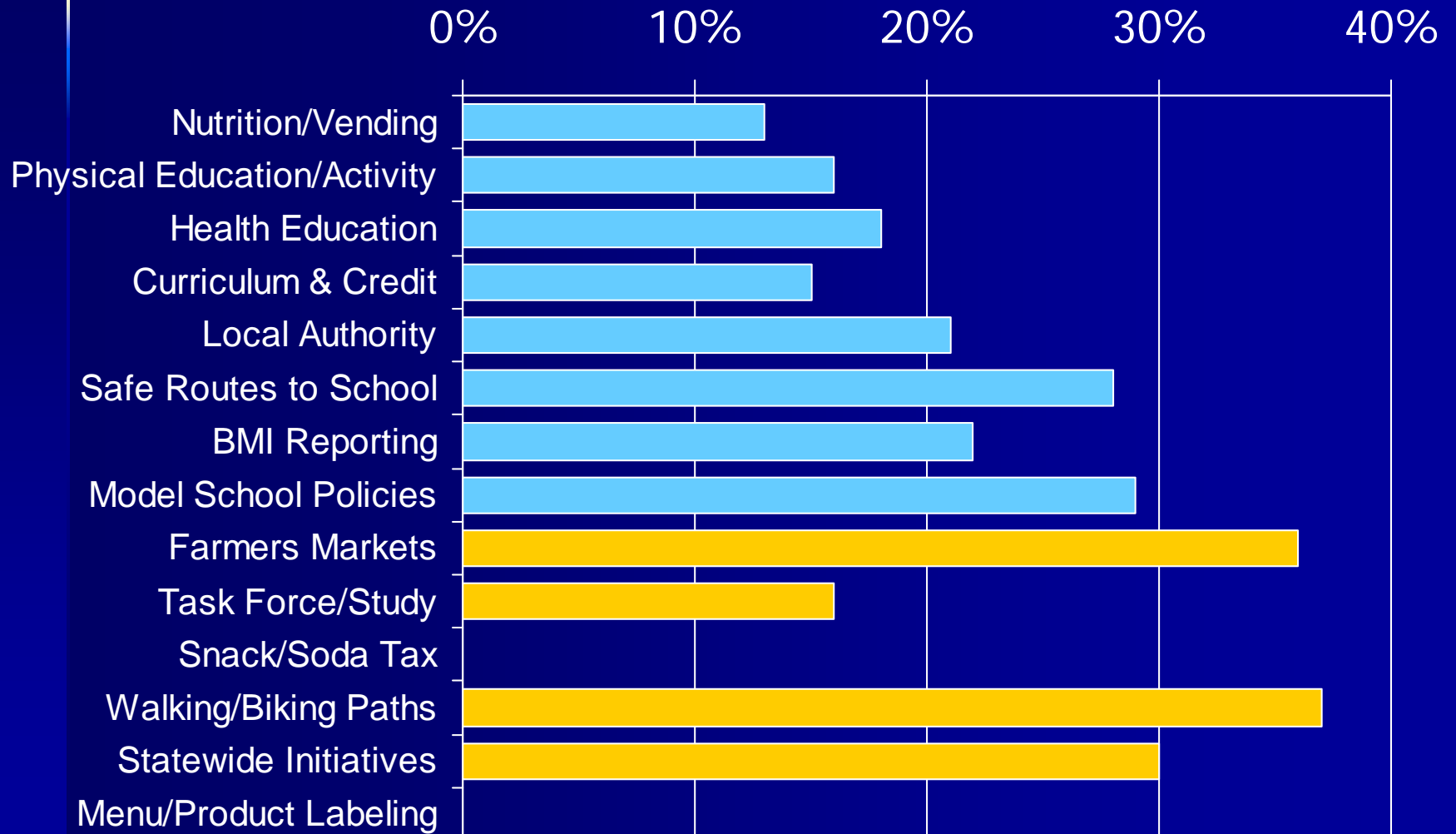
Phases 1 and 2:

1. Identify relevant legislation and describe patterns of introduction and adoption
2. Explore predictors and contextual factors affecting bill enactment

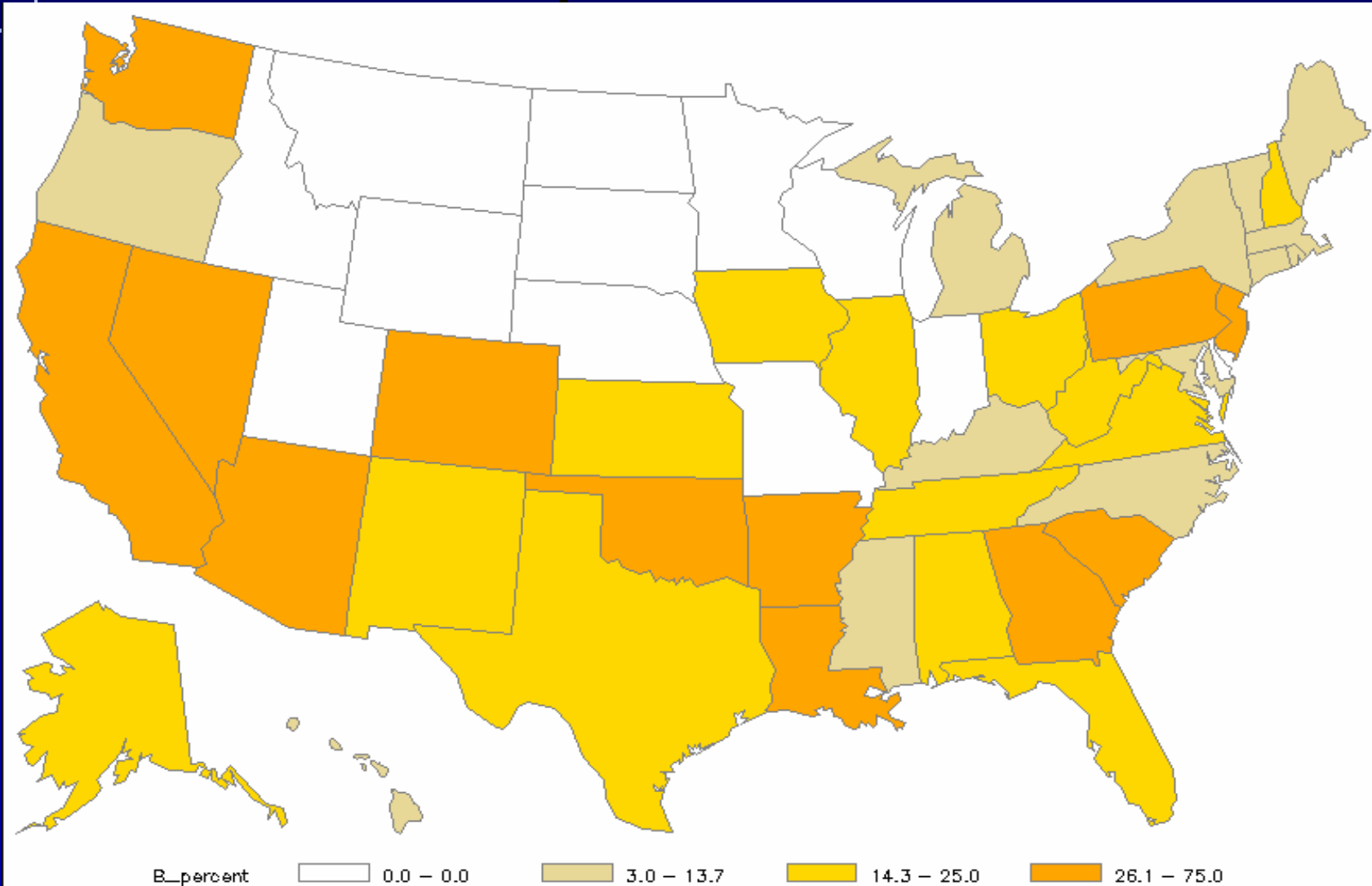
Results Summary: Objective 1

- Descriptive statistics to describe patterns by time, place, and topic area
- During 2003-2005
 - 123 of 717 (17%) bills were adopted
 - 71 of 134 (53%) resolutions were adopted
 - Introduced legislation increased 70%
 - Adopted legislation increased 38%

Bill Enactment (%) by Topic Area, 2003-2005



Bill Enactment (%) by State, 2003-2005



Results Summary: Objective 2

- Bills were more likely to be introduced if:
 - Introduced in Senate vs. House
 - >1 sponsor from a single party

- Bills were more likely to be enacted if:
 - Budget bills – enacted 75% of time
 - Involved community walking/biking paths

- Bills were less likely to be enacted if:
 - Proposed a new law (vs. amendment)
 - Proposed to generate revenue through taxes or fines
 - Involved PE, health curriculum, nutrition/vending regulations

Phase 3: Purpose

Objectives:

- Identify factors of state legislative environment important for successful childhood obesity prevention legislation
- Describe significant barriers to passing & adopting childhood obesity prevention legislation

Phase 3: Methods

- Key informant interviews with state legislators and staffers
- Interview questions
- Sample selection
- Telephone interviews conducted:
Dec 05 – April 06
- Qualitative data analysis

Results: Sample

- N=16: 11 legislators, 5 staffers
- Political party: 80% Democratic
- Backgrounds: law & education (20% health)
- Time in state legislature: range=4-21 years; mean=11.8 years
- Legislative responsibilities

Interview Question #1

In your view, what factors support or facilitate the introduction and adoption of childhood obesity prevention legislation?

Results: Facilitators

National Media Exposure

“[Which bills pass] depends on what makes it into the media.”

Results: Facilitators

Introduction by senior legislators & those with personal interest

- "You need ... committed legislators. Legislators who are going to say, 'I'm going to put myself on the line and push for something.'"
- "We said that we need to do something about the obesity issue instead of just inform the public...We just did basic fundamental thinking of, what can we do to help? And then: what can we do that will pass?"

Other Facilitators

- Gaining support of key players
- Working in supportive political climate
- Attempting incremental changes

Interview Question #2

In your view, what factors oppose or inhibit the introduction and adoption of childhood obesity prevention legislation?

Results: Barriers

Lobbyists of companies producing unhealthy foods

- "We cannot underestimate the power of the food lobby, the soda lobby, the restaurant association..."
- "You can't blindside the lobbyists...I had this one...bill, we had as many lobbyists in the room as legislators...Lobbyists are there. They get paid and they can watch things a lot more carefully than public interest groups, which are not as well-funded."

Results: Barriers

Misconceptions about negative outcomes for schools

“Representatives who voted no [on school junk food bill] indicated that their schools had encouraged them to vote no. Some of them implied that soft drink companies had put pressure on them as well. But most of them, even the ones who said they got pressure from the soda companies, all of them mentioned pressures from their school districts they represented, saying that their school districts feared they would lose money.”

Interview Question #3

Legislation sometimes passes in increments over a period of time, eventually leading to a comprehensive set of bills vs. the initial adoption of comprehensive bills. Do you think that childhood obesity prevention legislation is more likely to progress through (1) a series of several incremental bills or (2) a few comprehensive bills?

Question 3 Results

- Childhood obesity prevention legislation is more likely to pass through:
 - Series of incremental bills (73%)
 - One comprehensive bill (18%)
- "I think incrementalism is the name of the game here in the legislature, given our fiscal constraints."

So what?

- What we already know:
 - Lobbyists
 - Incrementalism
 - Political climate

- What we can do:
 - Learn to work within the system
 - Learn from other areas of success (tobacco)
 - Train community advocates to use media
 - Educate constituents

- Other needs & priorities
 - More on the evidence base for child obesity policy
 - *e.g.*, IOM recommendations
 - Need for practice based evidence
 - Explore the generalizability of various policy approaches

Recommendations

- Build & advocate for issues incrementally
- “If you [researchers] can get things into the media, it’s very helpful to legislators.”
- “When you want to pass legislation like this, you really want to make sure that the people who are going to be implementing it and the people who are affected by it are involved in your legislative planning.”

Thank you!

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*“Remember when we used to
have to fatten the kids up first?”*