



National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education, and Families

**What Are *CITIES* Doing To Combating Childhood Obesity:
The Relationship between Research and City Policy**
Active Living Research Annual Conference
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Childhood Obesity: Facts on an Epidemic

◆ *9 million*: approx. number of children over the age of six who are considered obese

◆ Rates of obesity in children 6-11 years have more than tripled in the past 30 years.

◆ Obesity epidemic occurs “across all socioeconomic groups and among all racial ethnic subpopulations.”
(Institute of Medicine, 2005)

◆ Higher rates for some groups: among black and Latino children, *one child in every four* is considered obese

Childhood Obesity: Impact on Youth and Cities

Physical Health Risks

- ◆ Type 2 diabetes (once considered “adult onset”)
- ◆ Greater risk of heart attack, stroke, hypertension

Mental Health Risks

- ◆ Isolation and depression when faced with teasing about weight and personal appearance

“...the first generation of children in American history that will be less healthy and have a shorter life expectancy than their parents.”

\$100 billion per year...

future health costs to families, businesses, and governments due to increases in childhood obesity (National Institutes of Health estimate)

Combating Childhood Obesity: What Cities Can Do

- ◆ City policy changes can serve as the centerpiece for community-wide efforts to promote regular exercise and good nutrition.
- ◆ City officials can:
 - 1) *educate* the public about the threat obesity poses to children's health,
 - 2) *promote* interventions for high-risk populations, and
 - 3) *execute* an agenda that engages all segments of the community.

City Strategy Center

- ▶ Forging partnerships with schools
- ▶ Making the most of out-of-school time
- ▶ Promoting access to nutritious foods
- ▶ Reshaping the physical environment
- ▶ Parks and recreation opportunities

Cities & Childhood Obesity

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Key Opportunities

- Help strengthen and implement school wellness plans
- Build public support for school initiatives to improve nutrition
- Expand access to athletic fields and recreational facilities

City-School Partnership Success...

The City of Decatur, Ga. (pop. 20,000) worked with Decatur Schools to implement a Safe Routes to School program, making it safe, convenient, and fun for students to walk or bike to school:

- ▶ 88% increase in students walking or biking to school
- ▶ Heightened community focus on health and physical activity

Cities & Childhood Obesity

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Key Opportunities

- Quality standards for afterschool programs
- Create partnerships to encourage physical activity
- Participation in federal child nutrition programs
- Highlight innovative programs

Out-of-School Time Success...

In Somerville, Mass., the city's health department has worked in partnership with afterschool programs to promote healthy eating and physical activity:

- ▶ All 15 afterschool programs in the city are using The HEAT Club (Healthy Eating and Active Time) curriculum, which focuses on preparing healthy foods and becoming more physically active.

Cities & Childhood Obesity

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Key Opportunities

- **Establish formal advisory cttes. to expand healthy food access**
- **Attract supermarkets to underserved, low-income neighborhoods**
- **Engage local grocery stores and restaurants**
- **Support farmers' markets that sell fresh fruits and vegetables**
- **Develop community gardens**

Healthy Food Access Success...

Founded through a partnership with the City of New Haven, Conn., in 2004, CitySeed is a farmers' market collaborative:

- ▶ Markets operate in four city parks, one on the route of a free downtown trolley
- ▶ CitySeed markets accept electronic benefit cards for food stamps and WIC nutritional coupons

Cities & Childhood Obesity

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Key Opportunities

- Identify conditions that impede walking and biking
- Build walking trails, bike paths, and pedestrian malls
- Create safe routes to school for students
- Adopt traffic-calming strategies to enhance child safety
- Use “form-based” zoning codes to promote active living

Success in Reshaping the Environment...

The City of Oakland, Calif., enacted a Pedestrian Master Plan in 2002, focused on ensuring that the city is safe, convenient, and attractive place to walk:

- ▶ Established a Pedestrian Route Network to connect schools, libraries, parks, and commercial districts
- ▶ Emphasizes walkability in city land uses and site designs

Cities & Childhood Obesity

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- ▶ **Parks and recreation opportunities**

Key Opportunities

- **Sponsor free or low-cost programs that encourage physical activity**
- **Expand parks and recreation facilities in underserved neighborhoods**
- **Build bridges to other agencies and community groups**
- **Ensure that city recreation programs serve nutritious foods**
- **Require action by youth programs receiving city funding**

Parks and Recreation Success...

The Salisbury, New York, Parks and Recreation Department has made childhood obesity a main focus of its programming:

- ▶ Salisbury Parks and Recreation dept. has created indoor walking paths and a year-round greenway system for children ages 5 to 12, and offers “activity-related” prizes to encourage participation
- ▶ Salisbury school system has been pivotal in generating involvement in classes



Creating a Local Action Plan: Five Key Components

**FORGING A COMMON
VISION**

**ENGAGING ALL
STAKEHOLDERS**

**DEVELOPING
STRATEGIES**

**SHARING
ACCOUNTABILITY**

**COORDINATING
INITIATIVES**

Using Research to Inform Policy: Key Considerations when Working with City Officials

Accurate

Accurate and never misleading information

Relevant

*Research that meets the needs
of the community the policy will target*

Compelling

*The research should tell a compelling story.
It should indicate that timely action is important.*

Using Research to Inform Policy: Key Considerations when Working with City Officials

Timely

Political Timing

Consideration of political factors such as the budget cycle or elections

Community Timing

*Is the community in need of or interested in this change?
Is this the right change at the right time?*

Savannah, GA

- The Healthy Savannah Collaboration is partnering with the Georgia Southern Center on Bio Statistics.
- Collecting baseline data for the City (by census blocks) and the Savannah Schools.
- The data will be used by the Healthy Savannah Advisory Council to direct their action plan.
- This Action Plan will lay out the creation of the Savannah Community Wellness Policy

Combating Childhood Obesity: YEF Institute Resources

- ◆ *Combating Childhood Obesity* Action Kit for Municipal Leaders. Request additional print copies by emailing iyef@nlc.org.
- ◆ Childhood Obesity network, with monthly e-news updates – to join, email martin@nlc.org.
- ◆ Contact Leon T. Andrews, Jr., Director for Youth Development, NLC's Institute for Youth, Education, and Families at 202 626 3039, or by email at andrews@nlc.org.