

# PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

## Health Department Strategies



### Obesity Prevention Programs for People with Disabilities

Disability and obesity are complex public health challenges. Groups at the state, regional, local and neighborhood levels provide a vital role in implementing steps to help combat obesity among people with disabilities and assist them in achieving healthy weight and an improved quality of life.

### What is Healthy Weight?

Healthy weight is the weight appropriate for a person's height and is based on a balance of calories consumed and calories used. People with disabilities may have difficulty achieving and maintaining a healthy weight. While most who are not at a healthy weight are usually overweight or obese, some are underweight. This brief addresses the issue of disability and obesity.

### Considerations for Increased Physical Activity and Improved Diet for People with Disabilities

These considerations may include:

- **Physical activity environments that are accessible, safe and supportive of persons of all abilities;**
- **Changing the environment of the community** so that healthy, active lifestyles are the "norm" not the exception;
- **Improving access to nutritious foods and meals;**
- **Increasing social support** that encourage healthy living and improved work opportunities;
- **Promoting strategies that encourage both greater inclusion of, and accessibility for people with disabilities in obesity prevention efforts;**
- **Targeting media and health department programs, to increase awareness of obesity and disability.**

### Physical Activity and Healthy Nutrition in Communities for People with Disabilities

Environmental barriers can promote physical inactivity and increased consumption of less healthy food; people with disabilities are more affected by this and experience more barriers such as lack of sidewalks, accessible parks, access to public transportation, access to and affordability of healthy foods, which has the potential to contribute to disparities in obesity rates between people with and without disabilities.

## Emerging Practices

The following are some emerging practices from CDC's funded state based programs:

### South Carolina

South Carolina created *Steps to Your Health*, an evidenced-based wellness promotion program developed specifically for adults with intellectual disabilities, brain injury, and associated conditions. *Steps to Your Health* is an eight week, small group instructional program targeted to achieving and maintaining a healthier lifestyle, including good nutrition, preventing obesity and its complications, increasing exercise, dealing with stress, and improving communication.

### Montana and Iowa

The Montana *Living Well with a Disability* Program is designed to help people with a disability strengthen existing skills to live well. The workshop itself includes eight, two hour sessions that introduce a process for setting and clarifying goals, as well as teaching skills for generating, implementing, and monitoring solutions. The Iowa Disability and Health Program developed a statewide network of community providers that offer the *Living Well with a Disability* intervention program.

## Did You Know?

- Disability affects more than 56 million people in the United States.
- There are many types of disabilities, such as those that affect a person's: hearing, vision, movement, thinking, remembering, learning, communicating, mental health, and social relationships.
- More than one-third of adults in the United States are obese, a 122% increase from 1980.
- Obesity is more common among people with disabilities than for people without disabilities and is an important risk factor for other health conditions.
- Adults with both disabilities and chronic conditions receive fewer preventative services and are in poorer health than individuals without disabilities who have similar health conditions.
- Annual health care expenditures associated with disability are estimated at \$400 billion.
- Obesity-related health care expenditures for adults are estimated at \$147 billion annually, with annual per person spending almost \$1,500 more for someone who is obese compared with someone with a healthy weight.

***Health Departments along with community partners can implement strategies which make healthy choices available, affordable, and easy for people with disabilities.***

**CDC funds activities to evaluate physical activity and healthy weight management for people with limb loss/limb difference, paralysis, and Intellectual Disabilities.**

### **RESEARCH:**

CDC conducts research that describes rates of obesity in people with disabilities, including type of disability. Further research, testing, and evaluation could lead to developing more valid and reliable ways to accurately assess, measure, and/or reduce obesity and its related health risks among populations with disabilities.

### **COLLABORATION:**

Public health approaches that can reach large numbers of people in multiple settings—such as child care facilities, workplaces, schools, communities, and health care facilities—can help people make healthier choices.

**For more information,** please contact Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)  
1600 Clifton Road, NE,  
Atlanta, GA 30333  
Tel: 1-800-CDC-INFO  
TTY: 1-888-232-6348  
Email: [cdcinfo@cdc.gov](mailto:cdcinfo@cdc.gov)  
Web: [www.cdc.gov/disabilities](http://www.cdc.gov/disabilities)