

Communities Putting Prevention to Work



PORTLAND, MAINE Obesity Prevention

Communities Putting Prevention to Work (CPPW) is an initiative designed to make healthy living easier by promoting environmental changes at the local level. Through funding awarded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2010, a total of 50 communities are working to prevent obesity and tobacco use—the two leading preventable causes of death and disability.

“THE PORTLAND FARMERS’ MARKET IS THRILLED FOR THE WHOLE COMMUNITY TO HAVE GREATER ACCESS TO THE MARKET AND TO HEALTHY, LOCAL FOODS. YOU CAN NOW BUY VEGETABLES, FRUIT, MEAT, CHEESE, EGGS, FLOUR ... AND EVEN VEGETABLE SEEDLINGS ALL AT THE FARMERS’ MARKET, WITH SNAP, AND THEY’RE ALL MAINE GROWN AND PRODUCED!”

— Jaime Berhanu, Coordinator, Portland Farmers’ Market Association

Community Overview

Portland, Maine, is tackling obesity throughout the community of 66,194 residents. In Portland, 37% of the adult population is overweight, 20.1% of adults are obese, and only 28.3% of adults consume fruits and vegetables five or more times per day. Additionally, 15.3% of Portland high school students are overweight or obese.



In Portland, certain populations are disproportionately affected by overweight and obesity. It is difficult to assess rates of overweight and obesity among Maine’s racial and ethnic minorities due to small sample sizes, though some reports indicate that the obesity rate among blacks in Maine is approximately 37%. Further, Maine adults with low socioeconomic status are more likely to be overweight or obese. In addition to obesity prevention efforts aimed at Portland’s entire population, certain initiatives target high-risk populations.

Community Successes

If healthy options are not available, then healthy living is not possible. With the support of the CPPW initiative, Portland has implemented a variety of changes throughout the community to make healthy living easier.

To decrease the prevalence of obesity, Portland:

- Established five produce stands in low-income communities, all of which allow participants in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to use their benefits, including Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) to purchase produce.
- Improved infrastructure for bicyclists and pedestrians to facilitate active transportation and use of the local trail network. Efforts included improving existing bike lanes, planning for bike lane expansion, and installing signage.
- Implemented the *Smart Meals* initiative, which involves collaboration with local restaurants to add nutrition information to menus. Participants receive guidance and technical assistance from a registered dietician on how to offer healthier, lower calorie options. To date, 13 restaurants are implementing this effort.





“FARMERS’ MARKETS’ ACCEPTANCE OF SNAP BENEFITS AND WIC VOUCHERS IS HELPING MY FAMILY BECAUSE IT IS ALLOWING ME TO BUY EXTREMELY HEALTHY FOOD THAT HAS MANY VITAMINS AND NUTRIENTS AND A LOT OF FLAVOR.”

— Portland resident

Community Successes *(continued)*

- Established a minimum requirement of 30 minutes of daily physical activity in the afterschool program that serves approximately 450 public elementary school students.
- Installed physical-fitness courses at five elementary schools serving approximately 1,600 students.
- Launched two outdoor StoryWalks in Portland, which are children’s stories presented on large signs that encourage children to be active as they read the story.

(The list above is a sample of all activities completed by the community.)

New Salad and Fruit Bars Make Healthy Eating Easier for Students

Portland is increasing access to healthy food in all 16 public schools. Through 10 new salad and fruit bars, 7,000 students can enjoy a wide variety of fresh vegetables and fruits as part of the lunch menu. To support implementation of this initiative, food servers in schools were trained on how to prepare the produce. Additionally, schools received funds to assist with the purchase of kitchen equipment and utensils needed for the preparation of fresh foods and vegetables, including refrigeration units, food carts, and food processors. This effort is aided through the farm-to-school program, and it not only offers students healthy meal options but also supports local farmers in Portland.

Leadership Team

The leadership team includes high-level community leaders from multiple sectors, who have the combined resources and capacity to make healthy living easier. Members of Portland’s leadership team are key agents for change in their community. The leadership team includes representatives from the following organizations:

- City of Portland City Council
- Cumberland District Public Health Council
- Former Mayor and Community Stakeholder
- Health and Human Services Department, City of Portland
- Healthy Portland Advisory Board
- MaineHealth
- Planning and Urban Development Department, City of Portland
- Police Department, City of Portland
- Portland Public Schools
- Public Health Division, City of Portland
- Public Services Department, City of Portland
- United Way of Greater Portland

Additional Information

For more information, please visit www.publichealth.portlandmaine.gov.