



New Hampshire: Promoting Preschool Play and Healthy Plates

When Americans think of overweight or obesity, they often think solely of adults, forgetting that the obesity problem affects every age group, including young children. But, preschoolers also are at risk for obesity-related illnesses such as diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and sleep apnea, as nearly 25% of children aged 2 through 5 years are overweight or obese. Large numbers of children being cared for outside the home and because most children need to eat better and move more, child care centers are places where healthy habits can start. Child care providers can use new approaches to their work to help make this happen and ensure the health of children.



New Hampshire child care licensing regulations primarily address immediate health and safety hazards and education requirements of child care providers. Currently, they do not address or restrict sugar-sweetened beverages, and other foods with low nutritional value, prolonged television watching, and extended sedentary time. Because of this, the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (NH DHHS), Obesity Prevention Program decided to implement the Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care (NAP SACC) program in 12 child care centers. NAP SACC is designed to promote policies and practices that increase healthy eating and physical activity for preschool children in child care settings. The program uses an organizational self-assessment of nutrition and physical activity policies, practices, and environments to identify the strengths and limitations of a child care facility.

“NAP SACC meets child care programs where they are located,” said Regina Flynn, obesity prevention program manager. “Programs can make the changes they are comfortable with.”

The Department of Health and Human Services contracted with three consultants to lead the statewide NAP SACC efforts. While the consultants had content experience regarding nutrition and physical activity, the Obesity Prevention Program felt child care experience was a “must” and would be instrumental in promoting buy-in and facilitating consultant-provider relationships. Each consultant was required to complete a web-based training on the implementation of the NAP SACC assessment.

In Hindsight

The Obesity Prevention Program provided technical assistance to NAP SACC consultants throughout the program and conducted biweekly calls to address issues and provide resources as needed. The Obesity Prevention Program stresses the need for an initial face-to-face meeting with consultants. This will give state program staff an opportunity to share contact information, provide a resource list of “who to call for what,” to gauge future technical assistance needs as well as encourage the consultants to network and share ideas and take advantage of CDC resources.



Child care programs were self-selected to participate and given 2 weeks to complete the assessment tool. The NAP SACC consultants sat down with child care providers at the different sites to develop action plans for the specific areas they wanted to address. The consultants helped to put the plans into action by conducting workshops for the child care providers on childhood obesity, nutrition, physical activity, and working with families to promote healthy weight behaviors. Personal health and wellness for child care staff also was part of the training.

In all, 34 policies were created in the 12 child care centers, reaching more than 772 children. Policies included serving skim or low-fat milk to children older than 2 years of age, increasing daily servings of fruits and vegetables, providing healthier snacks, and increasing outdoor teacher-facilitated and active play time. The Obesity Prevention Program sees these new policies as multipliers.

“If child care centers are able to maintain policies over time, more and more children will be reached,” said Ms. Flynn. “Trained child care providers are like pollinators, taking their expertise with them as they transition to other opportunities.”

As policies and practices are being implemented in ways that support the work of the child care providers, it is the children that are truly benefiting. By providing active play and healthier plates in child care facilities, the children will be less likely to be affected by childhood obesity and have the opportunity to develop lifelong healthy habits.



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