

Addressing Obesity in the Child Care Setting

Program Highlights



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Division of Physical Activity, Nutrition and Obesity (DNPAO) funds state-level efforts to prevent and control obesity. Through a cooperative agreement, 25 state health departments receive funding to create and implement a comprehensive obesity plan. The program goal is to prevent and control obesity and other chronic diseases through healthful eating and physical activity. In addition, the Communities Putting Prevention to Work initiative funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 funds all 50 states and territories to address obesity through policy and environmental strategies.

Obesity Prevention in Childcare Settings

The obesity epidemic affects even the very young U.S. population. In 2007–2008, 10.4% of children aged 2 to 5 years were obese (defined as a body mass index at or above the sex- and age- specific 95th percentile on the 2000 CDC Growth Charts) (1). Health disparities exist for obesity even in this young age group, with the highest rates found among Hispanic children (14.2%) and with some of the lowest rates found among non-Hispanic white children (9.1%) (1).

Over the past few decades, more mothers entered the work force, placing more children in some form of child care outside the home. Children spend several hours per day in child care, and many receive the majority of their meals there (2). The child care setting also provides an opportunity for children to participate in play and physical activity.

Some states have implemented policies and regulations to provide healthy nutrition and age-appropriate physical activity for children, including limiting screen time, in various child care arrangements (3), and a comprehensive, coordinated effort to improve the quality of the child care environment could have a significant impact on preventing early childhood obesity. This comprehensive effort may include (4):

- Routinely updated regulations and/or quality rating and information systems;
- Monitoring and evaluation oversight of standards;
- Training and technical assistance for providers; and
- Self-monitoring or self-assessment tools to address updated standards.



State Activities in Childcare

Although state programs focus across age groups and settings, several states are working in the child care setting to address the prevention of early childhood obesity. Among the 50 CDC-funded states, 32 are targeting nutrition, physical activity, screen time, and/or breastfeeding in child care settings. These efforts include regulations, policies, and programs. Examples of innovative programs from three states—New York, South Carolina, and Wisconsin—follow.

New York

The New York State (NYS) Department of Health convened a task force of key leaders in child care to examine opportunities for systemic improvements in nutrition, physical activity, and screen time policies and practices in child care settings. The ongoing work of this task force has been integrated into the structure of the state's Early Childhood Advisory Council. NYS has supported the use and implementation of the Nutrition & Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care (NAP SACC) since 2008. This research-tested intervention focuses on changing the child care environment and has been implemented in child care centers statewide through a contract with the New York State Early Care and Learning Council. In addition to their dissemination and implementation of NAP SACC, NYS developed an add-on module focused on media reduction to assess and modify the screen viewing practices of participating centers.

To complement the environmental changes suggested by the NAP SACC tool, New York State's Child and Adult Care Food Program provides training and technical assistance directly to providers, children, and parents through the Eat Well Play Hard in Child Care Settings intervention. This intervention aims to improve the healthy eating and physical activity behaviors of preschool children aged 3 to 4 years. It also builds social support within the child care environment by including teachers and care providers in lessons and encouraging positive role modeling. Additional work has also been done to develop standard criteria for breastfeeding friendly child care centers and family day care homes. These efforts have resulted in numerous centers and homes attaining the "Breastfeeding Friendly" designation from the Child and Adult Care Food Program of the New York State Department of Health.

South Carolina

South Carolina is focusing their efforts on implementing curricula, impacting policies and environment supports, and strengthening voluntary standards within the state low-income voucher system. Since 2004, the state has implemented the Color Me Healthy (CMH) curriculum statewide through a network of regional trainers covering all 46 counties in the state. CMH is designed to improve fruit and vegetable consumption and physical activity among young children, aged 4-5 years, through nutrition education and increased opportunities for physical activity in the classroom. To date, 2,400 CMH kits have been disseminated and over 45,000 children have been reached through the curriculum. South Carolina has also implemented the NAP SACC self-assessment in a number of centers through a similar network of trainers.

South Carolina has created an Early Childhood Toolkit, geared towards providing skill-building and practical nutrition and physical activity applications for the family/home. It was also designed to impact policies and practices within child care centers. The toolkit contains the following components adapted for the state: Color Me Healthy Curriculum, Move More...It's in the Bag, Eat Smart...It's in the Bag, Container Garden, Raised Bed Gardens, Family Night, End of the Year Celebration, Move More ...It's in the Cards, Move More Reminders, NAP SACC. The toolkit is currently being pilot tested with a number of centers in South Carolina.

South Carolina is using their Communities Putting Prevention to Work funding to support changes in the state's voluntary child care voucher program to incentivize child care centers to make environmental changes to support healthy eating and physical activity. This initiative is designed to impact nutrition and physical activity of preschool-aged children in child care centers participating in the ABC Child Care Program, a voluntary child care voucher program serving low-income families. The initiative will serve to strengthen existing program standards, provide for enhanced training support to child care centers, further identify and document the importance of investing in children's nutrition and physical activity at a young age, and work through nontraditional groups to address nutrition and physical activity in South Carolina's preschool-aged population.

Wisconsin

With partners, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services' Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity (NPAO) Program has begun the Wisconsin Early Childhood Obesity Prevention Initiative. The purpose of this initiative is to prevent obesity among young children, specifically among 2- to 5-year-olds. To guide their work and focus efforts, the initiative's efforts began with a comprehensive formative assessment of the existing early childhood system, which included focus group discussions with child care (center- and family-based) providers around the state, discussions with parents of young children in child care, interviews with statewide early childhood associations and Head Start Directors, an assessment of several group child care centers' nutrition and physical activity environments, an extensive literature review, and direct observation of group child care centers and family child care provider homes. The results of these assessments are being used to help design a statewide obesity prevention intervention for the early childhood setting.

The formative assessment work has afforded the NPAO Program the opportunity to build new partnerships with several key organizations and agencies in the early childhood care and education system. This work has also allowed for a greater understanding of where obesity prevention strategies and policies could be implemented. A recent example of this was the state legislature's passage of a quality rating improvement system that included a wellness component. This wellness component includes recognition of group child care centers and family child care providers who are offering daily physical activity for children and nutritious meals and snacks (including participation in the Child and Adult Care Food Program). The

inclusion of the wellness component was due in part to the NPAO Program's relationship with the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF). DCF has become a strong partner in the initiative and was able to provide expert input into the development of such a rating system. Wisconsin is also in the process of developing *What Works in Childcare*, which features evidence-based strategies for preventing obesity in the early childhood setting.

In addition to the Wisconsin Early Childhood Obesity Prevention Initiative, the NPAO Program has been working with partners to promote gardening and breastfeeding in the child care arena. In cooperation with the University of Wisconsin Extension, Wisconsin developed the *Got Dirt? Garden Initiative*, which is designed to encourage child care providers, schools, and communities to implement gardens. The goal of the program is to improve access to and consumption of fruits and vegetables by increasing the number of youth gardens. The *Got Dirt? Garden Toolkit* contains information about how to start a garden in child care settings and provides examples of successful gardens in Head Start centers and family child care homes. In-person, hands-on trainings are available statewide to child care providers and teachers.

To promote breastfeeding at child care facilities, Wisconsin has developed a guide for child care providers called the *Ten Steps to Breastfeeding Friendly Childcare Centers*.

For more information:

Visit the CDC DNPAO Web site to learn more information about our funded state programs:
<http://www.cdc.gov/obesity>

References

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