

HIGHLIGHTS OF KEY LOCAL STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS CHILDHOOD OBESITY

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Center to Prevent Childhood Obesity is a national organization dedicated to reversing the childhood obesity epidemic by changing public policies and creating healthier environments in schools and communities. The center seeks to identify and promote the most promising obesity-prevention strategies in support of the nationwide movement to improve food and physical activity environments.

Leading national organizations have focused on communities' essential front-line role and actions that local governments can take to prevent childhood obesity. Policymakers have a plethora of options that can positively change our access to the consumption of healthy foods and beverages and promote regular, safe physical activity. These are well described by the Institute of Medicine (IOM), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and Leadership for Healthy Communities (LHC):

- The IOM report, [*Local Government Actions to Prevent Childhood Obesity*](#)¹ (released September 2009) identified 58 action steps, with 12 slated as *most promising*. The IOM report is specifically focused on strategies that are likely to directly affect children and that take place *outside* of the school day.
- The CDC report, [*Recommended Community Strategies and Measurements to Prevent Obesity*](#)² (released July 2009) identified 24 recommendations and suggested measurements. The CDC recommendations apply to both children and adults, and include those that can take place during school hours.

- The LHC [*Action Strategies Toolkit*](#)³ (released May 2009) identified 10 action strategies and 31 policy and program options with an emphasis on childhood obesity prevention. It includes strategies that can take place during school hours and outside of the school day. The toolkit also contains tips for getting started, state and local examples, and other resources.

This document highlights the leading policies that are most likely to change the local landscape to enable our children to achieve a healthy lifestyle and enable communities to reverse the obesity epidemic that threatens our children. The summary provided starts with the 12 main action steps identified by the IOM, which focus on time outside of school, and is supplemented with two additional action steps to address the need for policy change inside the school, during the school day. Comparable recommendations and policy options identified by CDC and LHC are included side-by-side with the highlighted IOM recommendations.

This list is not comprehensive and includes only local government strategies that the IOM considered the most likely to reduce childhood obesity, based on criteria including evidence of effectiveness and effect size, potential reach, impact, cost, and feasibility. Other strategies for addressing childhood obesity—such as providing incentives to enable small food store owners to carry healthy, affordable food; creating farmers' markets and community gardens; serving locally grown fruits and vegetables in schools; improving stairway access and appeal; and zoning for mixed-use development—can be stepping stones toward implementing the highlighted action steps. Those interested in local policy change are urged to learn about all of the policy options outlined in the three reports.

Key Local Strategies to Address Childhood Obesity

HEALTHY EATING		
IOM Action Steps ¹	CDC Recommendations ²	LHC Policy Options ³
Create incentive programs to attract supermarkets and grocery stores to underserved neighborhoods.	Communities should improve geographic availability of supermarkets in underserved areas.	State and local policymakers can provide grants and loan programs, small business development programs, and tax incentives that encourage grocery stores to locate in underserved areas. In addition, local policymakers can relax zoning requirements that make it difficult for supermarkets to move into densely populated urban areas.
Require menu labeling in chain restaurants to provide consumers with calorie information on in-store menus and menu boards.		Local policymakers can consider adopting policies to require fast-food and chain restaurants to provide calorie or nutrition information on their menus or menu boards.
Mandate and implement strong nutrition standards for foods and beverages available in government-run or regulated after-school programs, recreation centers, parks, and childcare facilities, including limiting access to unhealthy foods and beverages.	Communities should improve and increase the availability of affordable healthier food and beverage choices in public service venues. Communities should restrict availability of less healthy foods and beverages in public service venues. Communities should discourage consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages by, in part, banning their use in licensed childcare facilities.	
Adopt building codes to require access to, and maintenance of, fresh drinking water fountains (e.g., public restrooms).		
Implement a tax strategy to discourage consumption of foods and beverages that have minimal nutritional value, such as sugar-sweetened beverages.		
*Improve the nutritional quality of foods and beverages served and sold in schools and as part of school-related activities. ⁴	Communities should increase and improve availability of healthier food and beverage choices in public service venues. Communities should restrict availability of less healthy foods and beverages in public service venues.	Schools and school district officials can adopt vending machine policies that prohibit the sale of unhealthy foods and beverages, and can enforce a strong local wellness policy that limits the sale of competitive foods and beverages. State legislatures can support bills, amendments, and state boards of education policies that improve

HEALTHY EATING		
IOM Action Steps¹	CDC Recommendations²	LHC Policy Options³
		<p>access to and the quality of school meals. They can also implement strict competitive foods and local wellness policy standards.</p> <p>State legislatures can support bills, amendments, and state boards of education policies that improve access to and the quality of school meals. They can also implement strict competitive foods and local wellness policy standards.</p>

*Note, the IOM focus was on actions that can be taken outside of the school and school setting; thus this recommendation is not included in *Local Government Actions to Prevent Childhood Obesity* (see reference 4). CDC and LHC address actions both outside of and within the school setting.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY		
IOM Action Steps	CDC Recommendations	LHC Policy Options
Plan, build, and maintain a network of sidewalks and street crossings that connect schools, parks, and other destinations.	Communities should improve access to outdoor recreational facilities and enhance infrastructure supporting bicycling, walking, and access to public transportation.	State and local policymakers can support policies and funding to build trails through neighborhoods to connect homes with schools; ensure sidewalk continuity and direct routes for pedestrians and bicyclists; convert out-of-service rail corridors into trails and policies that increase access to walking trails; and develop or re-evaluate long-term transportation plans to set “active transportation” goals for walking and biking.
Adopt community policing strategies that improve safety and security of streets and park use, especially in higher-crime neighborhoods.	<p>Communities should enhance personal safety in areas where persons are or could be physically active.</p> <p>Communities should enhance traffic safety in areas where persons are or could be physically active.</p>	Local policymakers can increase policing in high-crime areas, pedestrian walkways, and parks; work with communities to employ alternative policing strategies, such as neighborhood watch groups; adopt problem-oriented policing, which promotes the systematic analysis of problems to identify potential solutions and partnerships with organizations and communities to reduce crime; and adopt community design strategies that discourage crime.
Collaborate with schools to develop and implement a Safe Routes to Schools program to increase the number of children safely walking and bicycling to school.	Communities should support locating schools within easy walking distance of residential areas.	Local government and school policymakers can adopt a Safe Routes to Schools program, as well as support walking school buses. State policymakers can apply for funding and ensure that the funding is available to local communities in a timely manner.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY		
IOM Action Steps	CDC Recommendations	LHC Policy Options
Build and maintain parks and playgrounds that are safe and attractive for playing, and in close proximity to residential areas.	Communities should improve access to outdoor recreational facilities. Communities should zone for mixed-use development.	State and local policymakers can approve construction of new recreational facilities along trails or public transit routes; assess the viability of and sustainability of redeveloping blighted areas and vacant lots into productive economic and recreational opportunities, including community gardens, parks and other green spaces. Local policymakers can support policies that maintain or create neighborhood parks.
Collaborate with school districts and other organizations to establish agreements that would allow playing fields, playgrounds, and recreation centers to be used by community residents when schools are closed (joint-use agreements).	Communities should improve access to outdoor recreational facilities. Communities should increase opportunities for extracurricular physical activity.	School officials can work with local government policymakers to allow community residents to use school facilities for physical activity and students to use community facilities.
Institute regulatory policies mandating minimum play space, physical equipment, and duration of play in preschool, afterschool, and childcare programs.		
*Increase opportunities for frequent, more intensive, and engaging physical activity during and after school. ⁴	Communities should require physical education in schools; increase the amount of physical activity in physical education programs in schools; and increase opportunities for extracurricular physical activity.	State policymakers can make 30 minutes of quality daily physical activity a requirement for all schools. School officials can create a comprehensive school physical activity program that includes opportunities to engage in daily physical activity throughout the school day, as well as in before and after-school programs. State and school officials can require minimum levels of regular, high-quality physical education per school day and ensure that students are active at least half of the time they spend in physical education.

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SOCIAL MARKETING		
IOM Action Steps	CDC Recommendations	LHC Policy Options
Develop media campaigns, utilizing multiple channels (print, radio, internet, television, social networking, and other promotional materials) to promote healthy eating (and active living) using consistent messages.	Communities should limit advertisements of less healthy foods and beverages.	School district officials and state and local policymakers can adopt vending machine policies that prohibit the marketing and sale of unhealthy foods and beverages in youth centers, schools, and parks department facilities in addition to other facilities owned or operated by state and local governments. They can also decline offers from food and beverage ... <i>(continued on page 5)</i> marketers to sponsor before and after-school programs and they can turn down donations.

References

¹Institute of Medicine. *Local Government Actions to Prevent Childhood Obesity*. Editors; Committee on Childhood Obesity Prevention Actions for Local Governments; Institute of Medicine; National Research Council. September 2009. Available at <http://www.iom.edu/CMS/3788/59845/72798.aspx>.

²Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Recommended Community Strategies and Measurements to Prevent Obesity in the United States. *MMWR* 2009;58(No. RR-7):1-30. Available at www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/rr/rr5807.pdf.

³Leadership for Healthy Communities. *Action Strategies Toolkit: A Guide for Local and State Leaders Working to Create Healthy Communities and Prevent Childhood Obesity*. May 2009. Available at www.leadershipforhealthycommunities.org/actionstrategies.

⁴Institute of Medicine. *Preventing Childhood Obesity: Health in the Balance*. [Report Brief]. September 2004. Available at <http://www.iom.edu/~media/Files/Report%20Files/2004/Preventing-Childhood-Obesity-Health-in-the-Balance/ChildhoodObesity4pagerfixforwebpdf.ashx>.