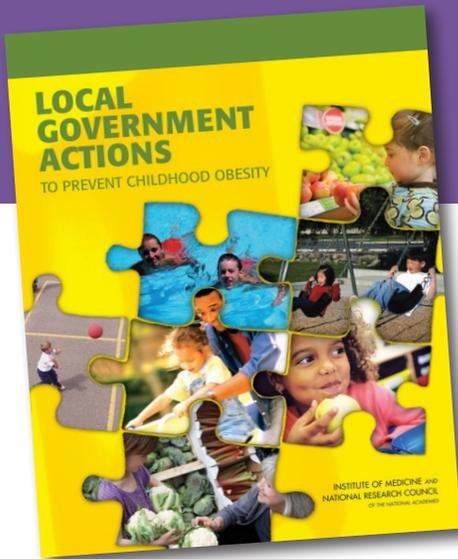


Actions for Healthy Eating



Local Government Actions

TO PREVENT CHILDHOOD OBESITY

The Challenges We Face: In the United States, almost 17 percent of children and adolescents between the ages of 2 and 19 are obese. The prevalence of obesity is so high that it may reduce the life expectancy of today’s children and diminish their overall quality of life. While parents and other adult caregivers can play a fundamental role in teaching children about healthy behaviors, those positive efforts can be undermined by local environments that are poorly suited to support healthy behaviors—and may even promote unhealthy behaviors. Local governments can play a crucial role in creating environments that make it easier for children to eat healthy diets and be more physically active.

Creating Equal Opportunities for Healthy Weight

Local officials have the opportunity to adopt policies and practices that will in turn help promote health equity and offer new opportunities for children to live healthier lives. For example, if local officials learn that children in certain neighborhoods consume too few fruits and vegetables, they should examine the accessibility of grocery stores in those areas. These officials could catalyze, support, or lead collaborations and engage diverse constituent groups in efforts to improve food access and affordability.

The Role of Local Government in Making Healthy Food and Beverage Choices Available Everywhere

Food choices made every day affect short- and long-term health and relate directly to achieving and maintaining a healthy weight, and we often are surrounded by foods and beverages that make such maintenance difficult. Local governments can provide strategic leadership for positive changes in the community food and beverage environment that will make the healthy choice the easy choice.

TODAY'S REALITY	TOMORROW'S VISION
Residents of low-income, minority, and rural communities are most likely to have poor access to supermarkets and other venues with healthy, affordable foods.	Increased access to healthy foods through local government strategies to increase the availability of supermarkets, grocery stores, and small stores that carry healthier, affordable food items.
The nutritional quality of meals and snacks available in buildings and programs operated by local government vary considerably.	Publicly run entities such as after-school programs, child care facilities and local government worksites have implemented policies and practices to promote healthy foods and beverages.
Americans are eating away from home more than ever before, and often it is difficult for them to make informed healthy choices in these settings.	Local government leadership has helped to make healthful foods available and identifiable in restaurants and other settings outside of the home.
Despite national recommendations to increase breastfeeding initiation and duration rates, many barriers make it challenging to start and continue breastfeeding.	With the leadership of local government, breastfeeding is promoted and supported, including at local hospitals, worksites, and public places.
Nutrition assistance programs provide children and lower-income people access to food for a healthful diet, but many who could benefit are not participating.	Participation in federal, state, and local government nutrition assistance programs has increased as a result of local government promotion efforts.

How could local governments help bring this vision to life?

- Conduct an assessment of the availability of healthy food and beverages in your communities. Include community members in the assessment and in identification of top priorities for action.
- Create incentive programs to attract supermarkets and grocery stores to underserved neighborhoods and increase the availability of affordable and healthy food items in all retail outlets through such methods as tax credits, grant and loan programs, small business and economic development programs, zoning changes, and other economic incentives.
- Offer incentives for restaurants that promote healthier options.
- Encourage farmers' markets to accept WIC food package vouchers and WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program coupons, and encourage and make it possible for farmers' markets to accept SNAP and WIC Program Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards by allocating funding for equipment that uses electronic methods of payment.
- Mandate and implement strong nutrition standards for foods and beverages available in government-run or -regulated after-school programs, recreation centers, parks, and child care facilities.
- Put policies in place to ensure that government-run and -regulated agencies responsible for administering nutrition assistance programs collaborate to increase enrollment and participation in these programs.
- Ensure that breastfeeding is permitted in public places and that government agencies operate breastfeeding-friendly worksites, which include lactation rooms.
- Adopt building codes that require access to, and maintenance of, fresh drinking water fountains.
- Implement a tax strategy to discourage consumption of foods and beverages that have minimal nutritional value, such as sugar-sweetened beverages.
- Develop media campaigns, utilizing multiple channels (print, radio, Internet, television, social networking, and other promotional materials) to promote consistent messages about healthy eating.

Why should we strive to bring this vision to life?

Evidence shows that...

- The diets of many children and adolescents are contributing to overweight and obesity, and are placing youth at risk for serious health consequences.
- Low-income neighborhoods are less likely to have community food environments that encourage or provide access to healthy foods and beverages and are more likely to offer high-calorie, low-nutrient foods and beverages.
- Local governments have traditionally been the primary overseers and implementers of public health programs and policies. In addition, they comprise a variety of other departments, including public works, transportation, parks and recreation, public safety, planning, economic development, housing, and tourism, all of which can influence the community food and beverage environment.



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