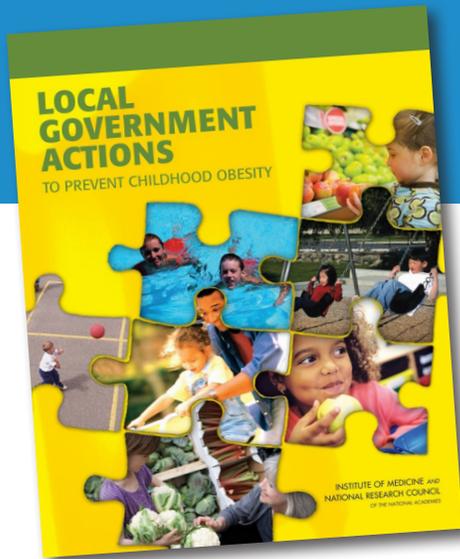


Local Government Actions

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 are aware that many children in certain neighborhoods do not engage in sufficient physical activity, they should examine the accessibility to recreation opportunities in those areas. These officials may then find themselves uniquely positioned to catalyze, support, or lead collaborations in the community and engage diverse constituent groups in efforts to improve access to physical activity in the places where children live, learn, and play.

The Role of Local Government in Supporting and Promoting Physical Activity

Physical activity is key to maintaining a healthy weight. Local governments can provide strategic leadership in the design and building of environments that encourage physical activity.

TODAY’S REALITY	TOMORROW’S VISION
Community residents often avoid walking or bicycling for transportation or recreation because routes to destinations such as recreation centers and shopping are lengthy, in disrepair, or unsafe.	Residents feel safe and comfortable walking or using bicycles to neighborhood destinations because local government actions have improved the built environment.
Many children do not walk or ride bicycles to school because the routes they would have to take are unsafe.	High-crime neighborhoods are targeted by local governments for changes that ensure that parents and children feel safe and secure about their walks or bike rides to school.
In many neighborhoods, parks and playgrounds are unavailable, in disrepair, or not accessible by safe routes.	Parks and playgrounds are made safe and attractive for playing and are in close proximity to residential areas through the actions of local government.
Preschool, after-school, and child care programs do not always provide adequate space, equipment, and time for children to play every day.	All preschool, after-school, and child care programs provide adequate space, equipment, and time for play due to local government leadership and action.

How could local governments help bring this vision to life?

- Conduct an assessment of opportunities for physical activity in a community. Include community members in the assessment and identification of top priorities for action.
- Plan, build, and maintain a network of sidewalks and street crossings that creates a safe and comfortable walking and biking environment connecting schools, parks, and other destinations.
- Adopt community policing strategies that improve safety and security for park use, especially in high-crime areas.
- Collaborate with schools to develop and implement a Safe Routes to School program to increase the number of children walking and bicycling safely to school.
- Build and maintain parks and playgrounds that are safe and attractive for playing and in close proximity to residential areas.
- Collaborate with school districts and other organizations to establish joint-use facilities agreements allowing playing fields, playgrounds, and recreation centers to be used by community residents when schools are closed.
- Institute regulatory policies mandating minimum play space, physical equipment, and duration of play in preschool, after-school, and child care programs.
- Adopt local regulatory policies limiting screen time in preschool and after-school programs.
- Develop media campaigns, utilizing multiple channels (print, radio, Internet, television, social networking, and other promotional materials) to promote consistent messages about physical activity.

Why should we strive to bring this vision to life?

Evidence shows that...

- Physical activity is critical not only for optimal weight, but also for physical and cognitive development in childhood.
- Increased concern about neighborhood crime has reduced outdoor play and decreased walking and bicycling in many communities.
- 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 physical activity environment.



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