

2010 KY Public Health Association Position Statement

Addressing Kentucky's Obesity Epidemic

Kentucky ranks 7th highest in adult obesity and 3rd highest for childhood obesity (1). Almost 80% of men and 59% of women are overweight or obese based on Body Mass Index figures (2). This translates into more diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, stroke, cancer, arthritis and even Alzheimer's disease and dementia (3). Within the next decade, obesity-related disability is predicted to spur a 10 – 25% increase in the number of people in need of nursing home care (3). The economic cost of obesity in Kentucky is \$1.2 billion a year in health care expenses (4).

This cost is only expected to increase. A third of the babies born in Kentucky in 2000 will develop diabetes during their lifetime (3). Up to 80% of overweight children will become overweight adults leading to a lifetime of poor health in compromised quality of life. This is the first generation predicted to have shorter life spans than their parents (5).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends policy change as one of the most effective strategies for making significant changes in obesity at the population level. Effective obesity policy promotes changes in the environment that help individuals take responsibility for improving their own nutrition and activity habits (6).

Multiple factors created this crisis: food choices, changes in the food system, community design, school and work place nutrition and physical activity environments, economic constraints, family and home influences, limited time, marketing and advertising, psychology, life stages, and genetics (7). Because the causes are found at so many levels, addressing the obesity epidemic must be a shared endeavor. Individuals, families, communities, schools, employers, businesses, insurers and government all have a role to play (6).

Shaping KY's Future provides a policy portfolio recommending 8 policies shown to reduce obesity. KPHA recommends the adoption of these policies.

1. Increase Physical Activity and Physical Education in Schools
2. Establish a Body Mass Index (BMI) Surveillance System for Youth
3. Support Breastfeeding in the Workplace
4. Require Standards for Nutrition and Physical Activity in Licensed Child Care Centers
5. Establish Complete Street Policies
6. Require Menu Labeling at Fast Food and Chain Restaurants
7. Require Healthy Food in State Agencies
8. Provide Incentives for Worksite Wellness (6).

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References:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Youth Risk Factor Surveillance System. 2007.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System. 2007.
3. National Governor's Association Investing in KY's Health. National Governor's Association Report on Healthy Living. www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0608HEALTHYREPORTKY.pdf
4. Finkelstein et al. State-level estimates of annual medical expenditures attributable to obesity. Obesity Research. 2004; 12 (1): 18-24.
5. Olshansky, et al. A potential decline in life expectancy in the twenty first century. New England Journal of Medicine. March 2005; 353:11:1138.
6. Shaping Kentucky's Future: Policies to Reduce Obesity. Partnership for a Fit Kentucky 2009.
7. Trust for America's Health. F as in Fat 2008: How Obesity Policies are Failing in America. 11.