

RECOMMENDATIONS

Media Campaign

Findings from both child care providers and parents strongly point to a media campaign targeted primarily to parents of preschool- and school-aged children. The State of California's "Champions for Change" advertisement, geared specifically to mothers "reclaiming" their kitchens, tested extremely well among parents in focus groups. The resonant theme of empowerment to do what they know is best for their children's health, coupled with the knowledge and information provided in the cookbook, indicates that a campaign that entwines these two themes is likely to be successful.

Tone and Content. Campaign messages should use a friendly and encouraging tone to promote small changes that people can accomplish, thereby gaining confidence to move to the next step toward improving the health of their families. Most critically, all messages must address real concerns parents have about the high cost and amount of time it takes to prepare healthier meals. A series of television and radio advertisements should be created that offer tidbits of information regarding some of the following topics.

- When to change from whole milk to 2% milk or a lower-fat milk
- What whole grains are and why they're healthier
- The nutritional value of individual fruits and vegetables, as well as why they're important for growing children
- Appropriate portion sizes for all ages
- The importance of turning off the television and talking during mealtimes
- Facts about childhood obesity
- Encouragement to exercise and move
- How to choose the right juices and beverages
- The benefits of purchasing local produce or shopping at farmers' markets

Distribution. The campaign must be multifaceted, with several entry points, to ensure that a varied audience receives the message.

- Use television for visual reinforcement of key messages. Preferred buys should target adult programming seen by mothers, particularly with the working mother in mind.
- Use radio spots for testimonials during morning and evening commute times.
- Provide recipes through mass mailings and distribution of print matter, showcasing photographs of children and parents enjoying healthy foods together.
- Target parents who use child care programs that benefit from USDA nutrition program funds.



- Target recipients of Food Stamps, TANF, Medicaid, and the Children’s Health Insurance Program with envelope stuffers.

WIC

WIC’s influence on the nutrition education of mothers of young children is well-documented. Child care providers, whether they have been on WIC or not, also acknowledge WIC’s capability. WIC mothers seem to have more knowledge about healthy snacks than about how to prepare healthy meals. WIC nutritionists said that more food demonstrations are needed to help parents implement the things they learn. To that end, the media campaign described above should be augmented by WIC in some of the following ways.

- Educational videos in WIC waiting rooms about how to prepare fruits and vegetables
- Distribution of the cookbook *Let’s Cook with Fruits and Vegetables*
- More targeted distribution of Zobey materials to both WIC parents and local child care providers
- Use of tools such as Zobey to model for parents during WIC classes, then distribute at the end of the class
- Food demonstrations at WIC clinics, along with tasting opportunities

Food Stamps Outreach

The results of the quantitative survey indicate that a very small percentage of parents have access to food demonstrations held at food banks or pantries. Considering the extent of the need for (and popularity of) food preparation demonstrations, these should be expanded to places that can accommodate more viewers. Some of these locations could include health fairs, school events (such as carnivals and parents’ nights), grocery stores, and other neighborhood venues. Food Stamps outreach workers should also be co-opted to offer more training for child care providers in efforts by the Department of Agriculture and local workforce boards.

Food Stamp eligibility letters and documents sent through the mail or handed to recipients should include informational materials that complement the media campaign.

Child Care Providers

In communications with child care providers, whether they concern new policies or helpful information to enhance their provision of nutritious foods, two important facts must be considered.

- 1) The needs of providers vary substantially depending on whether they operate out of their homes or out of a center. Their needs will also vary according to how



they purchase food (e.g., from a wholesale supplier, from a discount buying “club” such as Sam’s or Costco, or from the neighborhood grocery store).

- 2) No one mode of communication will work with all providers. Many homes lack Internet access or travel budgets to attend training. Many centers with Internet access may prefer distance learning or indirect opportunities. Almost all providers have access to DVD and/or video players.

Child care providers have expressed strong concerns about the nutrition of the children in their care, and thus are an excellent target audience for the distribution of social marketing materials. They generally responded positively to the proposed policy changes to align with the Healthy Snack Initiative, but also expressed concerns about higher costs and the need for ideas about how to implement the policy changes in ways that provide varied, filling snacks, particularly among their afterschool students. Providers have resoundingly expressed a need for additional training in how to implement the policy changes if they should come about. To that end, training in some of the following areas in particular should play a major part in helping providers institute the changes.

- (Bilingual) training for cooks in storage, kitchen math, and recipe ideas
- Cost-effective ways to create a variety of healthy, filling snacks
- Non-offensive, educational ways to communicate nutrition information and rules to parents
- Understanding the nutritional value of various fruits and vegetables
- Ideas for teaching young children about nutrition

Modes of Training. Generally, three types of training possibilities emerged, depending on the day care facility’s size, Internet access, and budget.

- Localized events (conferences, food demonstrations, etc.)
- Distance learning opportunities provided via Internet or by CD-ROM
- Personal visits by trainers

The Texas Department of Agriculture might consider the role of its auditors and allow them opportunities to train to reduce deficits providers may show in their feeding practices.



Partnerships. The data show that partnerships with nutrition programs work in favor of children and child care providers. Recommendations for enhancing these opportunities might include the following.

- WIC outreach to parents in child care, combined with nutrition education for both child care providers and parents
- Distribution of the Zobe program to all child care providers with specific instructions about how to integrate the information into their current lessons. It should also include information about what other programs or materials are available through its sponsors (WIC and CACFP). Follow-up phone calls should be made to the centers to answer questions and encourage use. The calls could also serve as an opportunity to make evaluations.
- AgriLife/Extension agents and Food Stamps outreach workers should expand demonstrations to child care facilities, offering them to both childcare center providers, cooks and parents.
- Replication of the SNAP efforts to coordinate messages at regional and local levels to involve educators and leaders in a collaborative effort to generate earned media and organize the community around localized strategies to complement the media campaign.

