



TEXAS

Health and Human Services

Texas Department of State
Health Services

Department of State Health Services Obesity Prevention Program Priority Objectives 2016 - 2021

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Obesity Prevention Program
Health Promotion and Chronic
Disease Prevention Section

Introduction

In 2015, one third of Texans were obese and an additional third were overweight. The Obesity Prevention Program at the Texas Department of State Health Services has worked with internal and external partners statewide to identify the following priority strategies to address these rates. Additionally, these strategies have been shown through current national and state peer-reviewed evidence to be effective when properly implemented and sustained.

The Obesity Prevention Program's work addresses many sectors and topics, yet at the core of these diverse strategies rests a common set of guiding principles. These values address the social disparities underpinning the obesity burden in Texas, and key concepts for achieving sustained, effective public health impact. While these principles are not specific goals of the Obesity Prevention Program, all interventions supported by the Program rely on the following guiding principles:

- Improve key social determinants that most impact obesity;
- Improve health equity;
- Increase resources and capacity of local health departments and community organizations to address obesity;
- Transform environments in Texas with evidence-based interventions addressing physical activity and healthy eating; and
- Collect and evaluate intervention data to ensure successful, impactful, and efficient use of public health resources.

The focus areas and strategies included in this document represent the work that the Obesity Prevention Program seeks to assemble partners around and dedicate available resources to accomplish over the next three to five years. The Obesity Prevention Program will serve as the lead organization for some strategies, but we invite other partners and stakeholders to lead initiatives to achieve the priorities that align with your organization's mission and goals.

Healthy Eating

The Obesity Prevention Program strives to help Texans eat healthier by making nutritious choices the easy choice throughout the state. When it comes to maintaining a healthy weight and reducing the risk of chronic diseases, good nutrition is key. The ability to eat healthy foods in Texas depends on accessibility, availability and affordability. While those living in food deserts face a burden with food insecurity, others in Texas face barriers on a smaller scale related to consuming foods that are of nutritious values.

There are many opportunities for healthy eating in the literature; the DSHS Obesity Prevention Program prioritizes evidence-based healthy eating practices that seek to:



- Promote purchases of prepared healthier food and beverages in restaurants, worksites and other community settings.
- Promote purchases of packaged healthier food and beverages in grocery stores, corner stores and other retail settings.
- Improve healthy vending policies in public and private worksites, hospitals, schools and government buildings.
- Enhance food service practices/nutrition standards with reduced sodium content in community prepared food settings.

Active Living

As lifestyles in the United States grow increasingly sedentary, an alarming rate of Texans fail to achieve even the minimum levels of physical activity recommended for staying healthy. In addition, opportunities for being physically active remain limited built environment to support active transportation and leisure time physical activity can benefit health outcomes. Conversely, obesity rates are frequently higher in underserved communities with limited resources for safe, fun, and engaging physical activity for all ages. The DSHS Obesity Prevention Program prioritizes evidence-based active living practices that seek to:



- Increase infrastructure in the built environment to facilitate active transportation and enhance access to physical activity opportunities.
- Strengthen policies for the built environment (community-scale, street-scale, transportation policies) that enhance access to physical activity opportunities.
- Increase the density and quality of recreation and fitness facilities in Texas communities.
- Provide and support community programs designed to increase physical activity.

Community and Clinical Preventive Services

Obesity, coupled with related chronic diseases and other conditions, negatively impacts the lives of many Texans. The responsibility of obesity prevention efforts is not limited to communities, schools, and worksites. The healthcare system is an integral piece of the equation and, when

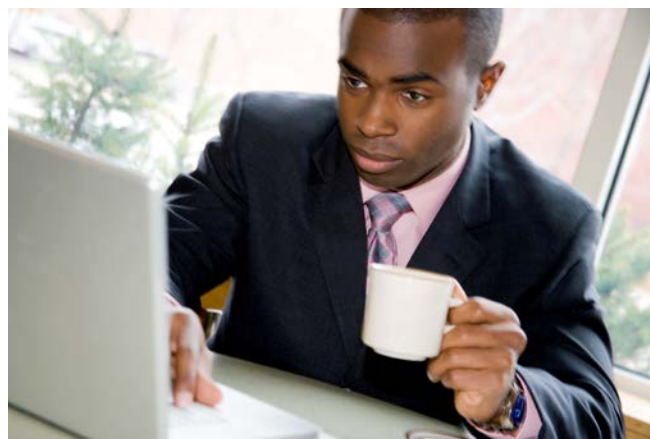


working in concert with these other sectors, can create a bigger impact. In this work, local public health agencies can act as a bridge between the healthcare sector and the broad community. The DSHS Obesity Prevention Program prioritizes evidence-based clinical prevention practices that seek to:

- Support improvements and advancements in health information technology for clinical health system quality improvement.
- Create and strengthen public health-clinical health linkages for efficient referral and follow up processes.
- Increase the integration and utilization of referral protocol into electronic health records at the clinic, health system and EHR vendor levels.
- Facilitate the training of public health and clinical health providers in evidence-based and guidelines-based education for consistent messaging to the public.
- Improve infrastructure and referral relationships for linking patients with or at risk for obesity to community services.
- Increase the number of health plans that reimburse for obesity screening, prevention and treatment services.

Worksites

Did you know American adults spend more of their lives at work than in almost any other community setting? Worksites play a key role in influencing what people eat, how active they are, stress levels, and the use of health benefits. The work environment—facilities, policies, benefit packages, etc.—offers critical opportunities for supporting healthy behaviors. Employers can



improve the work environment to be more supportive and help “make the healthy choice the easy choice” for staff seeking to live better. Conversely, the more barriers to healthy living a worksite contains, the less likely it is employees will make good health decisions. As employers grapple with increasing healthcare costs driven by lifestyle-related diseases such as obesity and diabetes, the need for effective worksite wellness programs and policies becomes all the more critical. To help employers create healthy work environments and quality programming, DSHS developed the [Work Well Texas Model](#) Program, which prioritizes the following strategies:

- Increase the proportion of worksites that offer evidence-based employee health promotion/wellness program for their employees.
- Train wellness coordinators and benefit coordinators on evidence-based models of health plan design to support obesity prevention.
- Implement and enhance policies, systems, and/or environmental changes in Texas worksites that increase access to opportunities for physical activity.
- Increase the proportion of employees who participate in employer-sponsored health promotion activities.

Healthy Childhood

Children who are overweight or obese experience greater behavioral, social, and emotional issues, in addition to compromised physical health (Sahoo, et al., 2015). Poor nutrition and sedentary lifestyle in childhood is associated with obesity and related chronic diseases in adulthood. If we do not alter this path, today's children will not outlive their parents; because of this, the DSHS Obesity Prevention Program has prioritized evidence-based practices that seek to:



- Improve food and beverage service practices/nutrition standards with reduced sodium content in childcare and school settings.
- Improve policies and environmental supports in childcare and school settings to increase physical activity among the children attending.
- Increase physical activity level of children age 5 – 15 during out of school time.
- Reduce caloric intake by children and adolescents in chain and quick-serve restaurants.
- Increase the number of childcare facilities with policies requiring age appropriate (60 to 90 min) minimum physical activity time per day for children attending the facility.
- Increase the number of childcare facilities with nutrition standards for foods and beverages provided to the children attending the facility.
- Increase the proportion of schools that do not sell or offer calorically sweetened beverages to students.

Messaging and Communications

Communications represents a critical piece of any health intervention, especially in today's crowded media market. Advertising for products that undermine healthy living—behaviors related to diet, physical activity levels, and tobacco use, among others—represents severe competition for health promotion advocates, who rarely work with comparable budgets.



Nevertheless, obesity prevention advocates can use many of the same tools and strategies to connect meaningfully with diverse audiences across an array of markets and platforms: social media, print, radio, and television. Prioritized communications strategies for the DSHS Obesity Prevention Program include:

- Develop and support a sustained, targeted physical activity and nutrition media-based social marketing plan.
- Implement common standards for marketing of foods and beverages to children and adolescents.
- Adopt consistent nutrition and physical activity education and advertising policies in Texas schools and universities.

Conclusion

The strategies outlined in this plan will not all happen in one year. Some of them will take five years or even longer to accomplish. Most of these strategies will also take the work of multiple engaged partners across multiple sectors to be successful. Even though this work is not easy or quick, it is necessary for improving the health and lives of Texans.

If you have questions about anything in this plan or if you are interested in leading or collaborating in work to implement strategies of the plan, feel free to contact any of the DSHS Obesity Prevention Program staff.

Resource links:

- www.dshs.texas.gov/obesity
- www.dshs.texas.gov/wellness
- www.wellness.state.tx.us
- www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2826832/
- www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3448210/
- www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4800915/
- www.thecommunityguide.org/
- www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/