

Resolution 05-03

**WASHINGTON STATE PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION
DECLARING OBESITY TO BE A SERIOUS THREAT TO THE HEALTH
AND WELL-BEING OF THE CITIZENS OF WASHINGTON STATE**

WHEREAS obesity due to sedentary behavior and excessive calorie intake is a leading cause of preventable death, and

WHEREAS obesity increases the risk of heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, and some cancers, reduces life expectancy, increases disability, increases social stigma, decreases work productivity and school achievement, and increases health care costs, and

WHEREAS the percentage of adults who are obese in Washington State has doubled in the last decade, with 22% of adults obese and another third overweight (2004), and

WHEREAS the patterns of overweight among children and youth in Washington State mirror those of the state and nation, which have more than doubled in the last two decades, and

WHEREAS it is the purpose of the Washington State Public Health Association to provide leadership for public health advocacy in the state and to promote public health issues,

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Washington State Public Health Association hereby declares that:

Obesity is a major public health problem and a serious threat to the health and well being of children, adults, and families throughout Washington State.

Immediate action must be taken. Individual habits related to diet and physical activity are established early in life and tend to persist through adulthood. Preventive action must be taken now, especially on behalf of children and youth, in order to avoid harmful effects that will undermine their health and their future.

Obesity can only be prevented through the combined efforts of the entire community. Multiple factors operating over several decades are responsible for the current obesity epidemic. These factors include but are not limited to:

- increased availability and promotion of foods containing high sugar and fat content
- land use and transportation developments that increase dependence on cars and discourage physical activity
- a shift to a service economy in which there is a decreased need for physical activity at work
- increased time pressures on families, which have reduced the opportunities and motivation for home cooked meals and increased the demand for prepackaged foods
- decreased emphasis on physical education and physical activity in school systems, and

- increased use of passive entertainment such as television, video games and computers.

Individual knowledge, motivation, and skills are insufficient by themselves to fully address the problem of obesity. Individual actions are significantly influenced by the policies and practices of organizations and institutions throughout the community that either foster or impede individual efforts to engage in healthy eating and physical activity behaviors, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT WSPHA therefore urges elected officials, government agencies, private businesses, the food industry, health care providers, schools, parents, and community organizations to immediately adopt and begin to implement recommended policies and practices to reduce the consumption of excessive calories and promote increased physical activity.

Signed by: Jeff Mero, WSPHA President, 2004-2005

Recommended Actions

The following list of recommendations¹ focuses primarily on children and youth, are drawn from state and national reports, and reflects but a sampling of the many actions that must be taken to address the obesity epidemic in our communities.

THE WSPHA BOARD URGES PUBLIC AND PRIVATE ENTITIES THROUGHOUT WASHINGTON STATE TO IMMEDIATELY TAKE THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS TO PREVENT OR CONTROL OBESITY:

Food Industry

- Reduce promotion of foods and beverages of minimal nutritional value (primarily high fat and/or sugar content), especially to children and youth.
- Full service and fast food restaurants should provide calorie and other nutritional information to consumers at point of purchase.
- Full service and fast food restaurants should provide and promote an increased number of healthy food and beverage options.

Schools

- Ensure that all children and youth participate in a minimum of 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity during each school day.
- Expand the opportunities for physical activity through physical education classes, intramural sports programs, physical activity clubs, after-school use of facilities, and walking/biking-to-school programs.
- Eliminate foods and beverages of minimal nutritional value in schools. Include healthier food and beverage options in vending machines, a la carte offerings and other competitive food venues, such as school fund raising activities.

¹ Resources:

Preventing Childhood Obesity - Health in the Balance, Institute of Medicine, 2005

“Monitoring population health indicators pertaining to the TPCHD health intervention priorities”, Office of Community Assessment/Epidemiology Unit, Tacoma Pierce County Health Department, October 2004

“Washington State Nutrition and Physical Activity Plan – Policy and Environmental Approaches”, Washington State Department of Health, 2003

Washington State Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey, 2002

Washington State Healthy Youth Survey, 2002

The Surgeon General’s Call to Action To Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity, 2001

Physical Activity and Health – A Report of the Surgeon General, 1996

- Ensure that all school-provided meals meet the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Planners, Governments, and Others Who Affect the Built Environment

- Revise comprehensive plans, zoning, and subdivision ordinances and other planning practices to increase availability and accessibility of opportunities for physical activity in new developments.
- Prioritize capital improvement projects to increase opportunities for physical activity in existing areas.
- Improve the street, sidewalk, and street-crossing safety of routes to school, develop programs to encourage walking and bicycling to school, and build schools within walking and bicycling distance of the neighborhoods they serve wherever possible.

Health Care

- Health care professionals should routinely track body mass index, offer relevant evidence-based counseling and guidance, serve as role models, and provide leadership in their communities for obesity prevention efforts.
- Professional organizations should disseminate evidence-based clinical guidance and establish programs on obesity prevention.

Workplaces

- Create opportunities for regular physical activity during the workday.
- Ensure that worksites provide healthful food and beverage options.
- Establish worksite exercise facilities or create incentives for employees to participate in local fitness programs.

Community Programs

- Private and public efforts to eliminate health disparities should include obesity prevention as one of their primary areas of focus and should support collaborative programs to address social, economic, and environmental barriers that contribute to the increased obesity prevalence among certain populations.
- Community child and youth-centered organizations should promote healthful eating behaviors and regular physical activity through new and existing programs that will be sustained over the long term.
- Communities should improve access to supermarkets, farmers' markets, and community gardens to expand healthful food options, particularly in low-income and underserved areas.

Home

- Choose exclusive breastfeeding as the method for feeding infants for the first four through six months of life.
- Provide healthful food and beverage choices for children by carefully considering nutrient quality and energy density.
- Encourage and support regular physical activity.
- Limit children's passive recreational activities, such as television, computers, and video games.