

Mayors and Local Officials Take Action

5 simple steps to success for Mayors and Local Officials

Elected officials offer the unique ability to spur action and bring communities together in this movement. Mayors and municipal officials are encouraged to adopt a long-term, sustainable, and holistic approach to fighting childhood obesity. This movement recognizes that every city is different, and every town will require its own distinct approach to the issue.

1. Become a Let's Move City & Town

A Call to Action for Mayors and Mayors and Municipal Officials

Over the past three decades, childhood obesity rates in America have tripled, and today, nearly one in three children in America are overweight or obese. One third of all children born in 2000 or later will suffer from diabetes at some point in their lives; many others will face chronic obesity-related health problems like heart disease, high blood pressure, cancer, and asthma. A recent study put the health care costs of obesity-related diseases at \$147 billion per year. This epidemic also impacts the nation's security, as obesity is now one of the most common disqualifiers for military service.

In a speech to mayors in January, First Lady Michelle Obama asked them to join the Let's Move! campaign to solve the epidemic of childhood obesity within a generation. "The idea here is very simple: to put in place common sense, innovative solutions that empower families and communities to make healthy decisions for their kids," stated Obama.

Find and Action Plan for Your City or Town

This action plan identifies steps mayors and municipal leaders can take to impact the epidemic of childhood obesity.

- **Help Parents Make Healthy Family Choices:** Mayors and municipal officials can help offer parents the tools, support, and information they need to make healthier choices for their families.
- **Improve the Health of Schools:** Help promote healthier food and physical activity in schools.
- **Increase Physical Activity Opportunities:** Promote increased access for physical activity outside of schools.
- **Make Healthy Food Affordable and Accessible:** Help eliminate food deserts in your community.

2. Helping Parents Make Healthy Family Choices

Parents play a key role in making healthy choices for their children and teaching their children to make healthy choices for themselves. In today's busy world, this isn't always easy. In the

following ways, mayors and municipal officials can offer parents the tools, support, and information they need to make healthier choices for their families.

Helping Parents in Your City or Town

- Launch a city website with information for parents on healthy living.
- Create a healthy food promotional campaign, and offer a “healthy eating” designation to restaurants who offer healthier food and beverages and reasonably-sized portions.
- Form a community coalition tasked with identifying local barriers to healthy living.
- Promote local community organizations that provide access to healthy activities.
- Through public service announcements and community events:
 - Serve as a role model in your own community by adopting a healthy lifestyle
 - Encourage parents to become healthy role models for their children
 - Encourage parents to help children get off to a good start by promoting breastfeeding

3. Healthy Schools

More than 31 million children participate in the National School Lunch Program, more than 11 million participate in the National School Breakfast Program, and many children are consuming up to half of their daily calories at school. As families work to ensure that kids eat right and have active play at home, we also need to ensure our kids have access to healthy meals in their schools.

The Healthier US Schools Challenge establishes rigorous criteria for schools’ food quality, participation in meal programs, physical activity, physical education, and nutrition education—the key components that make for healthy and active kids—and provides recognition for schools that meet these criteria.

Over the next school year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, working with partners in schools and the private sector, will double the number of schools that meet the Healthier US Schools Challenge and add 1,000 schools per year for two years after that.

Mayors and local officials can promote healthier food in schools in the following ways:

- Encourage local school districts to participate in the HealthierUS School Challenge (<http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/HealthierUS/index.html>)

- Encourage all schools to provide a school breakfast program
- Support the development of a summer food feeding program
- Encourage participation in federal child nutrition programs to address the needs of low-income children
- Encourage schools to implement the nutritional standards recommended by the Institute of Medicine for foods sold outside of school meals and in vending machines
- Restrict the sale of fast food in areas near schools

4. Accessing Healthy and Affordable Food

Eliminating Food Deserts

More than 23 million Americans, including 6.5 million children, live in low-income urban and rural neighborhoods that are more than a mile from a supermarket. These communities, where access to affordable, quality, nutritious food is lacking are also known as food deserts (<http://www.ers.usda.gov/FoodAtlas>). Lack of access is one reason why many children are not eating recommended levels of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Food insecurity and hunger among children is widespread. A recent USDA report showed that in 2008, an estimated 49.1 million people, including 16.7 million children, lived in households that experienced hunger multiple times throughout the year.

Making Healthy Food Accessible and Affordable in Your City or Town

Mayors and municipal officials can help combat food deserts in their communities by taking the following steps:

- Offer incentives to new and/or existing food retailers to offer healthier food and beverage choices in underserved areas.
- Pass food policies that require food and beverages purchased with government funds to meet certain nutrition standards.
- Support the sale of local foods across the community by offering incentives and encouraging the establishment of farmers' markets.
- Establish a policy to apply nutrition standards to all food sold (e.g., meal menus and vending machines) within local government facilities.
- Adopt zoning laws that limit fast food establishments.
- Promote mixed-use zoning so that land-use policies encourage residential uses near commercial, institutional, and other public land uses.

- Require access to free and safe drinking water in public places.
- Ensure that residents can access healthy and affordable food through public transportation—by realigning bus routes, providing free shuttles, or other means.
- Promote policies that support and protect community gardens. For example, mayors can work with local neighborhoods to convert blighted areas into green spaces that can be used for community gardens.
- Form a local food policy council (<http://www.statefoodpolicy.org>) or participate in an existing one.

5. Physical Activity

Children and Teens Need to Get Active

Children need 60 minutes of active play each day. Yet, the average American child spends more than 7.5 hours a day watching TV and movies, using cell phones and computers, and playing video games, and only a third of high school students get the recommended levels of physical activity. Through public-private partnerships, and reforms of existing programs, Mayors and community leaders can help address this imbalance.

Promoting Physical Activity in Your City or Town

Mayors and community leaders can promote increased physical activity in the following ways.

- Participate, and encourage other groups and organizations to participate, in the President's Physical Fitness Challenge (<http://www.presidentschallenge.org>).
- Require daily physical education for students in kindergarten through grade 12 (150 minutes per week for elementary schools and 225 minutes per week for secondary schools).
- Encourage schools to incorporate at least 20 minutes of recess per day, in addition to physical education classes.
- Build physical activity into classroom lessons. For example, take a walk outside as part of a science class or ask students to name and act out action words from a story through physical activity.
- Encourage schools to offer physical activity opportunities before or after school hours.
- Promote safe routes to school.
- Work with school officials to develop joint-use agreements so that community residents can use school facilities for physical activity, and school officials and students can use community facilities for physical activity.

- Incorporate physical activity into the planning and design of every physical improvement to the city – from municipal buildings to new parks to streets and sidewalks.
- Incorporate pedestrian and bicycle lanes into street development.
- Promote spaces for community members to be active – including parks and green space, outdoor sports fields and facilities, walking and biking trails, public pools, and community playgrounds – and prioritizing the development of these spaces in underserved areas.
- Enhance public safety near parks and other public spaces so that people feel safe using these amenities.
- Develop a “park deserts map” that indicates the distance from population centers to parks and green spaces.
- Offer intramural sport physical activity for students of all skill levels.
- Foster partnerships within the community among schools, business, and nonprofit organizations to encourage physical activity.
- Join with amateur and professional sports teams to promote physical activity.

Resources

For more ideas, strategies and guides, take advantage of these recommended resources:

1. Action Strategies for Healthy Communities - The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Leadership for Healthy Communities (PDF <http://usmayors.org/chhs/healthycities/documents/guide-200908.pdf>)
2. “Combating Childhood Obesity” Action Plan for Municipal Leaders - The National League of Cities (PDF <http://usmayors.org/chhs/healthycities/documents/guide-200908.pdf>)
3. Local Government Actions to Prevent Childhood Obesity - National Academies, Institute of Medicine (PDF <http://usmayors.org/chhs/healthycities/documents/guide-200908.pdf>)
4. “Mayors Guide to Fighting Childhood Obesity” - The U.S. Conference of Mayors (PDF <http://usmayors.org/chhs/healthycities/documents/guide-200908.pdf>)
5. “Recommended Community Strategies and Measurements to Prevent Obesity in the United States” - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (PDF <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/rr/rr5807.pdf>)