

FACT SHEET • SEPTEMBER 2006

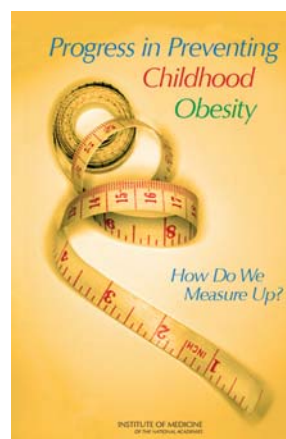
WHAT GOVERNMENT CAN DO TO RESPOND TO CHILDHOOD OBESITY

Federal, state, and local governments are actively engaged in childhood obesity prevention efforts. However, the level of funding and resources invested in these efforts, and their monitoring and evaluation, is not commensurate with the seriousness of this public health problem. Currently, 33.6 percent of American children and adolescents are either obese or at risk of becoming obese.

Government at all levels serves several vital functions in a national public health crisis such as the childhood obesity epidemic. Government demonstrates leadership by establishing the childhood obesity epidemic as an urgent public health priority and coordinating the public- and private-sector response. Government's role in galvanizing the response involves political commitment, policy development, prioritized funding, and coordination of programs. Other necessary elements of an adequate governmental response to the obesity epidemic are a strong governmental workforce, an enhanced organizational capacity, and a robust information-gathering system to monitor progress and guide programs and policies.

The Institute of Medicine report, *Progress in Preventing Childhood Obesity: How Do We Measure Up?*, offers steps for government to respond to the obesity epidemic as an urgent national priority. The report calls on federal, state, and local governments to lead and commit to childhood obesity prevention by mobilizing the resources required to identify, implement, evaluate, and disseminate effective policies and interventions that support obesity prevention goals.

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Recommendations for Government

PROVIDE LEADERSHIP AND SUSTAINED COMMITMENT

Federal, state, and local governments should each establish a high-level task force to identify priorities for action, coordinate public-sector efforts, and establish effective interdepartmental collaborations.

EVALUATE POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

Federal and state governments should consistently evaluate the effects of all actions taken to prevent childhood obesity and strengthen evaluation capacity, paying particular attention to culturally relevant evaluation approaches.

- Congress should increase support for capacity-building activities, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's State-Based Nutrition and Physical Activity Program to Prevent Obesity and Other Chronic Diseases and the Steps to a Healthier US program.
- Federal and state agencies should assess and strengthen the capacity of state and territorial health departments to provide leadership and technical assistance, enhance surveillance efforts, and implement and evaluate prevention programs.

MONITOR PROGRESS AND CONDUCT RESEARCH

Governments at all levels should develop new surveillance systems or enhance existing systems for monitoring relevant outcomes and trends and should increase funding for childhood obesity prevention research.

- Federal and state surveillance systems should monitor the full range of outcomes

in the evaluation framework. Surveillance systems should be expanded to include relevant obesity-related outcomes. Surveillance systems that monitor the precursors of dietary and physical activity behaviors and the outcomes of related policies should be expanded or developed.

- All states should have a mechanism in place to monitor childhood obesity prevalence, dietary factors, physical activity levels and sedentary behaviors through population-based sampling over time.
- Congress should sufficiently fund research on obesity prevention to improve program implementation and outcomes for children and youth.

DISSEMINATE PROMISING PRACTICES

Government at all levels should commit to the long-term support and dissemination of childhood obesity prevention policies and interventions that have been proven to be effective.

- Federal, state, and local governments should publicly disseminate and promote the results of evaluations of childhood obesity prevention policies and interventions.
- The federal government should provide a sustained commitment and long-term investment to adequately support and disseminate childhood obesity prevention programs and policies that are proven to be effective and those that are vital to monitoring trends and measuring progress in response to the epidemic.
- Incentives and awards should be developed for state and local government agencies to coordinate efforts that improve the obesity-related health outcomes for children and youth.