

FACT SHEET • SEPTEMBER 2006

WHAT INDUSTRY CAN DO TO RESPOND TO CHILDHOOD OBESITY

Market forces may be very influential in changing both consumer and industry behaviors. All relevant industry stakeholders—including food and beverage companies, quick serve and full serve restaurants, food retailers, recreation and leisure companies, entertainment companies, and the media—should share responsibility for supporting childhood obesity prevention goals. Industry can be instrumental in changing social norms throughout the nation so that reducing childhood obesity prevalence will be acknowledged as an important and preventable health outcome and healthful eating and regular physical activity will be the accepted and encouraged standard.

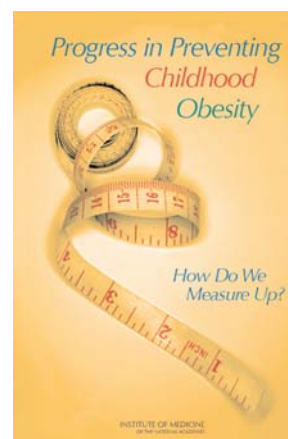
The Institute of Medicine (IOM) report, *Progress in Preventing Childhood Obesity: How Do We Measure Up?*, recognizes many examples of positive changes made by industry that collectively can contribute to halting and reversing the childhood obesity epidemic. However, most companies do not provide enough publicly accessible information about these changes to accurately assess progress. It is important to identify specific criteria that the public health sector and industry can mutually agree upon, and use that information to make evidence-based changes to improve the public's health.

Specific criteria upon which positive industry changes can be evaluated may include:

- Increasing the proportion of a company's product portfolio and marketing resources devoted to developing, packaging, and promoting products that contribute to healthy lifestyles;
- Reducing the portion sizes of food and beverage products and restaurant meals;
- Disseminating information that promotes healthful diets and regular physical activity;
- Engaging in public-private partnerships to promote healthful eating and active lifestyles to children and their families.

The IOM report discusses strategies undertaken by industry in the areas of product and meal development and reformulation, product packaging and meal presentation, physical activity opportunities, advertising and marketing communications, information and education, public-private partnerships, employee wellness initiatives, and corporate social responsibility. The report offers steps for individual companies and industry sectors to respond to the childhood obesity epidemic.

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Recommendations for Industry

PROVIDE LEADERSHIP AND SUSTAINED COMMITMENT

Industry should use the full range of available resources and tools to create, support, and sustain consumer demand for products and opportunities that support healthy lifestyles, including healthful diets and regular physical activity.

- Support and market product innovations and reformulations that promote energy balance at a healthy weight.
- Support the review of the existing self-regulatory guidelines of the Children's Advertising Review Unit (CARU) for advertising directed to children.
- Expand and apply the guidelines to newer forms of advertising vehicles.

EVALUATE POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

Industry should partner with government, academic institutions, and other interested stakeholders to undertake evaluations to assess its progress in preventing childhood obesity and promoting healthy lifestyles.

- Evaluate progress in developing and promoting affordable foods, beverages, and meals that support a healthful diet; physical activity products and opportunities; and storylines and programming that promote healthy lifestyles.
- Provide resources and expertise to local businesses and community-based organizations to implement and evaluate healthy lifestyle initiatives, especially for children and youth in racially and ethnically diverse groups and high-risk populations.

MONITOR PROGRESS AND CONDUCT RESEARCH

Congress, in consultation with industry and other relevant stakeholders, should appropriate adequate funds to support independent and periodic evaluations of industry's efforts to promote healthier lifestyles.

- FDA should be given the authority to evaluate restaurants' expansion of healthier food,

beverage, and meal options; the effectiveness of restaurants providing nutrition labeling and nutrition information at point of choice; and the effect on consumers' purchasing behaviors.

- CDC should evaluate the effectiveness of corporate-sponsored physical activity programs and energy-balance education programs on children's leisure-time preferences and behaviors.
- Congress should designate a responsible agency to conduct the periodic monitoring and evaluation of the self-regulatory guidelines, including an assessment of CARU's effectiveness, impact, and enforcement capacity.
- The food retail sector, restaurant sector, and relevant trade associations should collaborate with the USDA and DHHS to provide marketing data on pricing strategies, consumer food purchases, and consumption trends from retail scanner systems, household scanner panels, household consumption surveys, and marketing research.
- Industry should share marketing research findings that may help public health professionals and community-based organizations develop and implement more effective childhood obesity prevention efforts.

DISSEMINATE PROMISING PRACTICES

Industry should collaborate with the public sector and other relevant stakeholders to develop a mechanism for sharing proprietary data and a sustainable funding strategy that can inform and support childhood obesity prevention interventions.

- The private and public sectors should share proprietary data that can inform research efforts and assist in developing a healthy lifestyles social marketing campaign. This campaign should be sustained via a long-term funding strategy that includes a dedicated government appropriation and a dedicated set-aside from relevant industries.
- Government and other interested stakeholders should develop incentives and rewards for industry stakeholders that collaborate on this endeavor.