

Case Study

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California Plan Encourages the Creation of Active, Healthy Communities

States have become concerned about the increasing number of overweight and obese people in the United States, and have resolved to take action. Nationwide, 16 percent of children and teens and 30 percent of adults are considered obese, and the rates are increasing.¹ Obesity can lead to increased risks for other health problems such as type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, hypertension, stroke, and some types of cancer.² Obesity also can reduce economic productivity and lead to increased health care costs.

In California, a third of children and over half of adults are overweight or obese.³ California's lost work productivity and increased health care costs due to obesity are estimated at \$28 million for 2005.⁴ To address concerns about obesity and related health risks, California is taking comprehensive action to encourage the creation of healthier communities. Seeking to address some of the causes of obesity (such as lack of access to nutritious foods and inactivity) Governor Schwarzenegger developed "A Vision for California - 10 steps to Healthy Living," which emphasizes the promotion of healthy foods and physical activity for children and adults.⁵

In September 2005 Governor Schwarzenegger convened the Summit on Health, Nutrition, and Obesity.⁶ This Summit brought together state officials, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector to explore ways they could partner to support the Vision for a Healthy California. Following the Summit, the California Health and Human Services Agency established the Get Healthy California! Workgroup to help ensure that commitments made by Summit participants are implemented.⁷ The state also created an honor roll to recognize participants' efforts.

In addition to convening the Summit, Governor Schwarzenegger signed legislation in 2005 mandating the development of the [California Obesity Prevention Plan](#) to address rising rates of obesity.⁸ The California Division of Health Services was responsible for developing the plan, with input from internal and external advisory groups (including representatives from the California Departments of Education and Parks and Recreation, local health departments, and transportation planning groups).⁹ The plan, which was released in September 2006, recommends coordinated roles for state and local government, employers, health care insurers and providers, families, schools, the food and beverage industry, entertainment industry, and also professional sports teams. It calls for supporting the creation of healthier communities through policy changes involving land use, transportation, school wellness, supermarket siting, and healthcare. The plan will be implemented through local assistance grants, other funding and incentives, and voluntary action.

State Action

The California Obesity Prevention Plan recommends direct state action to improve access to healthy foods and provide safe, convenient, active travel options. Suggested measures include:

- Implementing “walkable communities” policies;
- Siting schools near public transportation;
- Utilizing transit-oriented development, and encouraging the siting of supermarkets near public transportation;
- Requiring access to park land and recreation facilities for every community;
- Providing access to public facilities that would promote physical activity;
- Using zoning/planning to promote access to nutritious foods and safe transportation; and
- Helping to ensure that food assistance programs provide healthy foods.¹⁰

State Partnerships with Local Governments, NGO’s, and the Private Sector

Under the California Obesity Prevention Plan, the state will work with local government, the private sector, and other organizations and individual actors to promote healthy choices. Partners are offered incentives and funding, and in some instances encouraged to volunteer.

The Plan’s Recommendations for School Action

The California Obesity Prevention Plan recognizes that childhood obesity is a particular concern that can be addressed in part through changes in school policies. In addition to Governor Schwarzenegger’s sponsoring and signing legislation banning junk food in schools, the plan’s other recommendations include:

- Finding healthier alternatives for school fundraising;
- Utilizing federal funds and programs to help provide nutritious foods in schools;
- Setting additional standards for foods and beverages available in the schools; and
- Making recreational facilities available to the community after hours.

Public/Private Coordination

One outcome of the Governor’s Summit on Health, Nutrition, and Obesity, was the creation of an honor roll which recognizes leading organizations in California for innovative activities that contribute to the achievement of the state’s goals. Recognized activities include:

- Placing healthy choices at checkout lines in grocery stores;
- Offering healthy snack options in movie theaters;
- Creating, labeling and highlighting healthy menu items in restaurants;
- Designing and building pedestrian-oriented new developments;
- Distributing health assessment materials;
- Providing free gym access to students participating in the Governor’s Fitness Challenge; and
- Raising funds for community healthy eating and active living projects.

Healthy Eating and Active Living Campaign

In addition to state action and public/private partnerships, California is seeking to make healthy eating and active living part of the state identity through a marketing campaign. This campaign includes:

- Public service announcements;
- Healthy product placement;
- Training for health care professionals; and
- Incorporating the Healthy California message into private company products and services.

Implementation and Next Steps

The state and its partners are taking action to implement the plan's recommendations and reach the goals laid out in the Vision for a Healthy California. In 2005 Governor Schwarzenegger signed a bill that bans junk food in schools and provides funding for fresh fruits and vegetables in school meals.¹¹ The 2005 California budget provides funding to support the School Breakfast Program, California Fresh Start Pilot Program, and School Garden Program. These programs provide nutritious foods to students and teach students about nutrition and the process of growing food.¹²

Governor Schwarzenegger also signed Assembly Bill 2384, which creates the Healthy Purchase pilot program. This program promotes the sale of fresh produce in low-income communities by providing incentives and technical assistance to grocers. In addition, the 2006 budget designates funds for physical education equipment and teachers, and the state has added new partners to the honor roll.¹³

The recommendations outlined in California's Obesity Prevention Plan help to facilitate healthy choices by making them accessible and attractive. The state is implementing the plan by facilitating coordinated efforts by different sectors. These efforts are supported by a broad marketing campaign branding healthy eating and physical activity as a way of life for Californians. Taken together, these actions help to address some of the root causes of obesity (unhealthy eating and inactivity) through a comprehensive approach.

*This Case Study was researched and written by Heather Spence with editorial assistance provided by Darren Springer and John Ratliff.

¹ Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – Overweight and Obesity. Available at: <<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/>> (accessed November 9, 2006).

² Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – Overweight and Obesity. Available at: <<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/>> (accessed November 9, 2006).

³ California Obesity Prevention Plan. Available at:

<<http://www.dhs.ca.gov/CAObesityPrevention/California%20Obesity%20Prevention%20Plan.pdf>> (accessed November 9, 2006).

⁴ California Obesity Prevention Plan. Available at:

<<http://www.dhs.ca.gov/CAObesityPrevention/California%20Obesity%20Prevention%20Plan.pdf>> (accessed November 9, 2006)

⁵ Governor's Vision for a Healthy California. Available at:

<http://www.cnr.berkeley.edu/cwh/PDFs/Summit_Governors_Vision.pdf> (accessed November 9, 2006).

⁶ Governor's Summit on Health, Nutrition and Obesity - Press Release. Available at:

<<http://gov.ca.gov/index.php?press-release/1421/>> (accessed November 9, 2006).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ California Obesity Prevention Plan. Available at:

<<http://www.dhs.ca.gov/CAObesityPrevention/California%20Obesity%20Prevention%20Plan.pdf>> (accessed November 9, 2006).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ One program that already is helping to coordinate land use and transportation planning with local government is the Housing Incentive Program (HIP), part of the Transportation for Livable Communities (TLC) program at the San Francisco Bay Area's Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC). HIP rewards local governments for locating new housing near public transportation. HIP helps to facilitate projects, such as providing pedestrian and bicycle paths to connect a housing community to nearby transportation, schools, parks, and other community facilities. MTC Housing Incentive Program. Available at:

http://www.mtc.ca.gov/planning/smart_growth/hip.htm (accessed November 9, 2006).

¹¹ Governor signs legislation to prevent obesity – Press Release. Available at:

<<http://gov.ca.gov/index.php?press-release/1424/>> (accessed November 9, 2006).

¹² California 2005 State Budget Signed – Press Release. Available at:

<<http://gov.ca.gov/index.php?press-release/1748/>> (accessed November 9, 2006).

¹³ California Health and Human Services Agency Secretary's Update. Available at: <http://gov.ca.gov/index.php?blog/issue/blog-a-year-after-the-obesity-summit/health> (accessed November 9, 2006).

Governor signs legislation to fight obesity - Press Release. Available at: <http://gov.ca.gov/index.php?press-release/3874/> (accessed November 9, 2006.)