

Combating Childhood Obesity: A Call to Action for Community Groups in Central Appalachia

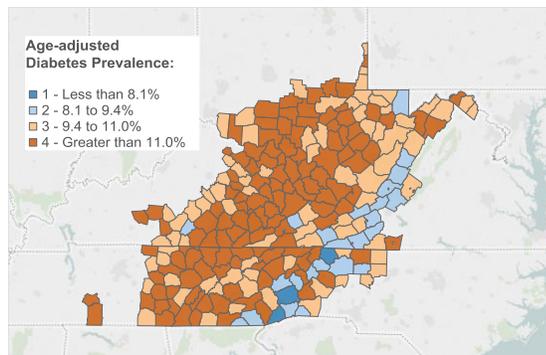
Appalachia Funders Network; East Tennessee State University; NORC at the University of Chicago

On behalf of the Appalachia Funders Network (AFN), with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, East Tennessee State University and NORC at the University of Chicago conducted a study to analyze the current burden of obesity and chronic disease in central Appalachia and identify promising practices and strategies that are having a positive impact on the reduction of obesity in the region. Central Appalachia consists of parts of Kentucky, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. Regional recommendations to reduce childhood obesity and improve the overall population's health were developed based on a review of current literature, a survey, and focus groups with both community groups and funders.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

- Obesity is rising among children, who may be the first generation of Americans to live shorter lives than their parents.¹
- In the United States, an estimated **1 in 4** young adults (17 to 24 years old) are too heavy to serve in the military.²
- Obese children are more likely to be obese as adults, and more likely to develop **early onset diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease**.³ Compared to the rest of the country, people living in central Appalachia are more likely to die prematurely from these diseases.⁴
- 69 percent** of counties in central Appalachia have an adult obesity prevalence (defined as a Body Mass Index of 30 or more) above the national median of 30.9 percent.⁴
- In 2012, the estimated cost of diagnosed diabetes in the United States was **\$245 billion**, including direct medical costs and reduced productivity.⁵ In central Appalachia, **88 percent** of counties have a diagnosed diabetes prevalence above the national median.⁴

Diagnosed Adult Diabetes in Central Appalachia



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

A number of factors - including nutrition, physical activity, and the built environment - impact obesity and weight status. These interventions are recommended, to promote healthy weight and reduce obesity.^{6,7,8}

Strategy	Interventions
Encourage physical activity or limit sedentary activity among children and youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement programs to increase physical activity in schools and after-school activities Build parks, outdoor recreation facilities Implement individual or community-level interventions that increase physical activity among youth*
Create safe communities that support physical activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement programs that support community-scale urban design (i.e. Creating Walkable Communities, Rails to Trails)
Promote the availability of affordable healthy food and beverages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement programs that bring healthy foods to schools (i.e. Farm-to-School, Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools) Implement community and school gardening programs
Support healthy food and beverage choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement programs to address healthy food and beverage choices Implement evidence-based school, health care and community-level interventions to improve nutrition and eating habits*

*The [Rural Obesity Prevention Toolkit](#) provides a list of evidence-based and promising practices for addressing obesity in rural communities.

HOW DOES YOUR COUNTY COMPARE?

A new [interactive data visualization tool](#) allows users to view maps, graphs, and data tables for a number of measures related to obesity and chronic disease mortality in central Appalachia. Use the tool to view county-specific data, and for state and national comparisons. Reports are available on the AFN website (See “For More Information” below). Within each report, users are able to:

- Filter results by state, county, or disease;
- View additional data by hovering over a specific county;
- Export maps and charts to a PDF or image.



CURRENT REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

Online surveys were conducted among community groups and funders, to inventory activities and policies across central Appalachia addressing healthy eating and physical activity. Community groups included health departments, local hospitals, school districts, community centers, among others. The list of regional funders was compiled by AFN. Focus groups were conducted separately with these two groups to learn more about strategies for success and challenges faced.

Community Groups Results: Examples of Current Regional Activities

Obesity Prevention Activities	Community groups currently supporting activity
Ensure USDA standards for school lunches are met or exceeded	49% (n=160)
Implement classroom-based health education programs	49% (n=148)
Adopt policies related to healthy vending	47% (n=151)
Build and/or maintain playgrounds so they are safe and attractive	36% (n=106)
Implement point-of-decision prompts to encourage stair use in schools, worksites, and/or other facilities	20% (n=60)
Establish healthy mobile markets	19% (n=61)

“We’re adding gardening because kids don’t know where their food comes from...If we introduce them at a young age and they grow it in the garden, they’re going to eat it. As our little radish girl told us, “I don’t know what a radish is but I’m going to eat it because I grew it.” – Community focus group participant

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUCCESS

Collaboration is essential to success

Policymakers, funders, and community organizations must work together to align interests and effectively promote better health in Appalachia.

Focus on policies/programs that influence the built environment and individual behavior interventions

To reduce obesity in a community requires changes to both the environment and individual behaviors, specifically physical activity and healthy eating. The survey found that community groups and funders support a wide range of interventions that support healthy eating and physical activity for students, workers and community members, as well as policies and changes to the built environments in which they live, work and play.

Leverage existing assets

Focus groups identified collaboration among partners/peers; community buy-in; support; advocacy; culture; strong community groups; and the workforce as critical Appalachian assets that must be leveraged to achieve success.

Focus on cross-sector collaboration and philanthropic strategies

It takes participation of a number of dedicated partners to improve the local food and physical activity environment in a community: Government, the healthcare system, schools, private businesses, and community organizations, all contribute to progress. Coalitions of these partners coordinate use of resources, leadership, and action to work together towards a common goal, leveraging multiple perspectives and areas of expertise.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information, including a final report of project findings, interactive maps and graphs, detailed references, and additional resources, please visit:

<http://www.appalachiafunders.org/data>

References:

- ¹<http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMs043743#t=article>
- ²http://cdn.missionreadiness.org/MR_Too_Fat_to_Fight-1.pdf
- ³<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-789X.2012.01015.x/full>
- ⁴Project data analysis. Available at <http://www.appalachiafunders.org>
- ⁵<http://care.diabetesjournals.org/content/36/4/1033.short>
- ⁶http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/downloads/community_strategies_guide.pdf
- ⁷<http://www.thecommunityguide.org/pa/index.html>
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