

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

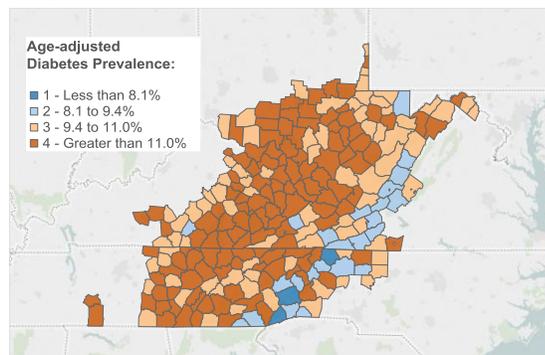
Appalachia Funders Network; East Tennessee State University; NORC at the University of Chicago

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. The following interventions have been recommended as strategies 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"> Fund physical activity programs in schools and after-school activities Build parks, outdoor recreation facilities Fund or advocate for programs that decrease screen time use
Create safe communities that support physical activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fund or advocate for bike lanes and infrastructure to support walking Fund or advocate for projects that create safe communities
Promote the availability of affordable healthy food and beverages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate for the availability of affordable healthy foods, particularly in underserved areas Support community and school gardening programs
Support healthy food and beverage choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support programs that improve nutrition in schools and public venues Support programs that discourage consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages

CURRENT REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

Online surveys were conducted of 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 with these two groups to learn more information, including strategies for success and challenges faced.

Funders Results: Examples of Current Regional Activities

Obesity Prevention Activities	Funders currently supporting activity
Support media campaign to promote access to fruits and vegetables	97% (n=30)
Increasing destinations within walking and bicycling distance	65% (n=20)
Offer incentives for farm-to-table programs at schools, worksites, and/or other local facilities	58% (n=18)
Establish healthy mobile markets	52% (n=16)
Promote physical activity via building or maintaining safe and attractive playgrounds	52% (n=16)
Support after-school programs for physical activity	48% (n=15)

KEY CHALLENGES

Community groups and funders discussed the challenges they face implementing obesity-prevention programs.

- **Time and Resources:** Community organizations felt that they lacked the resources and capacity to be successful in writing grants and implementing successful programs.
- **Leadership:** Strong leadership is necessary to successfully implement programs and initiatives related to obesity prevention and the built environment.
- **Sustainability:** Ongoing program funding and policy changes are needed to sustain successful programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUCCESS

Collaboration is essential to success

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

Focus on policies 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.

"It's the notion that nonprofits and social enterprises need equity and capital to build up, just like small businesses do... We're actually creating capacity from the beginning." – Funder focus group participant

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.

Effective philanthropic strategies include:

- **Co-funding:** Multiple foundations co-invest in a specific program or policy initiative.
- **Successive grant ladders and Capacity building:** Small grants allow for proof of concept or pilot programs. With success, the organization can apply for larger grants through the same funder or compete for national grants.
- **Community co-investment:** Requiring a level of matching funds through local fundraising, working with community foundations, and/or other partners, such as local businesses, can increase local investment and program sustainability.



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/data>
- ⁵<http://care.diabetesjournals.org/content/36/4/1033.short>
- ⁶http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/downloads/community_strategies_guide.pdf
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