

Combatting Childhood Obesity: A Call to Action for Policymakers in Central Appalachia

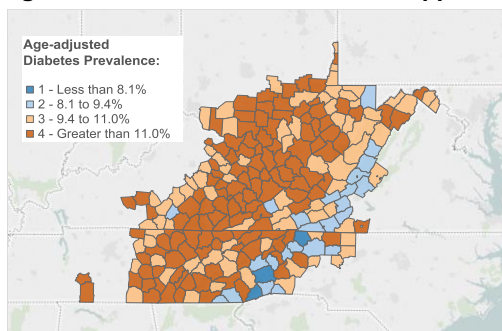
Appalachia Funders Network; East Tennessee State University; NORC at the University of Chicago

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 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"> Require PE in schools and increased levels of physical activity Allow use of school athletic facilities during non-school hours Reduce screen time in public service venues
Create safe communities that support physical activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance infrastructure to support bicycling and walking Improve access to outdoor recreational facilities Introduce community and street-scale urban design and land use policies
Promote the availability of affordable healthy food and beverages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decrease the cost of healthier foods Improve geographic availability of supermarkets Provide incentives for production, distribution, and procurement of foods from local farms
Support healthy food and beverage choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use pricing strategies to promote healthier food/beverage choices Institute smaller portion size options Eliminate sugar-sweetened beverages and establish nutrition requirements in licensed childcare facilities

CURRENT REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

Online surveys of community groups and funders provide an inventory of 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.

Nutrition

Examples of Regional Activities Currently Supported by Funders and Community Groups – Promoting Healthy Eating

Obesity Prevention Activities	Funders	Community groups
Support media campaign to promote access to fruits and vegetables	97% (n=30)	34% (n=78)
Offer incentives for farm-to-table programs at schools, worksites, and/or other local facilities	58% (n=18)	33% (n=108)
Establish healthy mobile markets	52% (n=16)	19% (n=61)

“We have a junk food bill - curbing access to unhealthy food and drink in school settings - in Kentucky; we got all kinds of kudos at the national level.” - Funder focus group participant

Physical Activity

Examples of Regional Activities Currently Supported by Funders and Community Groups – Encouraging Physical Activity

Obesity Prevention Activities	Funders	Community groups
Increasing destinations within walking and bicycling distance	65% (n=20)	14% (n=42)
Promote physical activity via building or maintaining safe and attractive playgrounds	52% (n=16)	36% (n=106)
Support after-school programs for physical activity	48% (n=15)	38% (n=113)

“What’s been gratifying about this work, especially in the area of fitness and academics, is that it’s led to some pretty high level policy changes in West Virginia where they’ve charged the schools all across the state to incorporate an extra 15 minutes’ worth of activity.” – Community focus group participant

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.

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/NEJMSr043743#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
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