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Let's Give Our Kids a Healthy Start

Medical costs in Vermont related to asthma, cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular disease have increased from \$1.52 billion in 2010 to \$2.04 billion in 2015. According to the Vermont Department of Health, the costs related to chronic diseases are expected to continue increasing by 75% from 2010 to 2020. The Vermont Department of Health points to poor diet as one of the three main factors responsible for these diseases.

It shouldn't be a surprise to learn that the adult obesity rate in Vermont has steadily climbed from 10% in 1990 to over 25% currently. In fact, more than 6 out of 10 Vermonters are now at an unhealthy weight. Our youngest Vermonters are already on the same path as the adult population; almost 30% are overweight or obese. The poor health caused by obesity and the escalating medical costs are an increasing burden on Vermont.



We must act before the problem gets worse. By establishing healthy eating patterns early on, we can prevent diet-related diseases. This is why as a State Senator, I introduced legislation that would ensure that restaurant kids' meals meet nutrition standards, including the default beverage. Soda and sugary drinks are the largest source of calories in a child's diet, contributing to half of their sugar intake. Each additional serving of a sugary drink consumed per day increases a child's chance of becoming overweight by 60%.

In recent years, the luxury of eating out has changed to a necessity for families. With busier lives, parents now spend most of their food budget on prepared foods. Children consume roughly 25% of their calories from eating out and they eat almost twice as many calories when they do, compared to a typical meal at home.

Restaurants have made some important steps towards voluntarily improving kids' meals, but progress is slow and modest. In the last few years, the percentage of kids' meals that meet nutrition standards only increased from 1% to 3%.

Given the sky-high rates of childhood obesity, states and localities should support parents in helping children make healthy food choices. We can make the healthy choice the easy choice for families by ensuring restaurants offer healthy kids' meals

Ensuring restaurants provide healthy kids' meals meets one of Vermont's health care goals. This legislative change would improve Vermonters' health outcomes early on at a crucial age. Legislators know implementing more, low cost prevention efforts pay off in the long run and I'm all for it, especially when it gets our kids off to a good start.

This Op-Ed piece is by Kevin Mullin, a former 19-year member of the Vermont General Assembly and current Chair of the Green Mountain Care Board.

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<https://www.ourherald.com/articles/lets-give-our-kids-a-healthy-start/>

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<http://www.benningtonbanner.com/stories/mullin-lets-give-our-kids-a-healthy-start,529568>

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<http://vermontbiz.com/news/2018/january/16/mullin-let%E2%80%99s-give-our-kids-healthy-start>

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http://www.caledonianrecord.com/opinion/columns/kevin-mullin-let-s-give-our-kids-a-healthy-start/article_47fc2122-2a83-590e-b2d8-b006c1525343.html

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