

Study Examines the Arizona Empower Program and Obesity Prevention Best Practices in Child Care Facilities

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What is the Empower Program?

Arizona's Empower Program is based on national health and safety standards for early care and education programs known as Caring for Our Children. The Empower Program was created in 2010 to promote adoption of healthy standards for children in Arizona's licensed child care facilities. Participating facilities receive discounted licensing fees if they agree to follow the 10 standards. Five of these standards relate to obesity prevention:

- Provide at least 60 minutes of daily physical activity, including adult-led and free-play. Limit screen time to 3 hours or less per week and no more than 60 minutes of sedentary activity at a time.
- Provide a breastfeeding-friendly environment.
- Limit serving fruit juice to no more than 2 times per week. (Water and milk are the preferred options for meal times.)
- Serve meals family-style and do not use food as a reward.
- Ensure that staff members and child care providers receive 3 hours of training annually on Empower topics.

Each of these 5 standards is made up of components that must be met to achieve the standard.

Why intervene in child care facilities?

- Many young children spend time in care outside of their home, making child care facilities a good place to reach young children with obesity prevention efforts.
- One in 4 low-income children in Arizona's Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) aged 2 to 5 years were either overweight or obese.
- Improving the environment of early care and education facilities may directly affect what children consume and how active they are, as well as help them develop healthy habits for life.

What was the purpose of the study?

The study reviewed surveys from 1,678 licensed child care facilities that participated in the Empower Program to determine how much the facilities applied the 5 obesity prevention-related Empower standards during the first 2 years of the program.

What did the study find?

Child care facilities that participated in the Empower Program varied in how much they adopted the 5 standards. One in 5 facilities reported full implementation of all 5 standards. In general, for standards with more components, there were lower levels of implementation than for standards with fewer components. Within each standard, the study found the following:



What were the critical components of the intervention?

- Using the Empower Program model to promote best practices that support healthy and safe child care environments.
- Partnering with their state licensing agency to offer lower licensing fees for facilities that agree to implement the Empower Program standards.
- Conducting regular training and technical assistance to child care staff.
- Using existing opportunities to collect evaluation data. In this study, licensing staff at the Arizona Department of Health Services collected data on implementation of standards during their regular site inspections, saving time and resources.
- Providing child care facilities with training and technical assistance for promoting parent education materials related to the Empower standards.



Staff Training Standard

With only one component, the staff training standard had the highest overall level of implementation, with 77% of the facilities reporting full implementation of this standard.



Family-Style Meals Standard

Almost 60% of the facilities fully implemented the family-style meals standard. Of its six components, banning the use of food as a reward or punishment had the highest level of implementation. Providing healthy eating information to families had the lowest level of implementation.



Fruit Juice and Water Standard

Just over half of the facilities fully implemented the fruit juice and water standard. Of its seven components, offering drinking water throughout the day was the area with the highest level of implementation. Providing families with information about fruit juice had the lowest level of implementation.



Physical Activity and Screen Time Standard

Nearly half of the facilities fully implemented the physical activity and screen time standard. Of its 10 components, providing free time outside was the component with the highest level of implementation. Providing information to families about screen time had the lowest level of implementation.



Breastfeeding-friendly Environment Standard

The breastfeeding-friendly environment standard had the lowest overall implementation of the five Empower standards with only 44% of the facilities fully implementing the standard. Of its four components, providing a refrigerator for breast milk was the component with the highest level of implementation and providing information to families had the lowest level of implementation.

Where can I find more information about the study?

The article "Implementation of Best Practices in Obesity Prevention in Child Care Facilities: The Arizona Empower Program, 2013–2015" is found in the Preventing Chronic Disease e-journal. (2017;14:160451. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5888/pcd14.160451>)