

North Carolina

Focusing Statewide Efforts on Healthy Children

Public Health Problem

The prevalence of overweight rose by 36% among North Carolina's children aged 2–4 years, by 40% among children aged 5–11 years, and by 14% among adolescents aged 12–18 years between 1995 and 2000, according to data from the state's Nutrition and Physical Activity Surveillance System.

Program Example

In North Carolina, Moving Our Children Toward a Healthy Weight: Finding the Will and the Way is a plan developed by the 100-member Healthy Weight Initiative (HWI) task force. The plan has been marketed to a broad group of stakeholders, who have made some of the plan's recommendations part of their own agendas. For example, the Health and Wellness Trust Fund Commission, which administers part of the tobacco settlement funds in North Carolina, established a \$9 million, 3-year obesity prevention grant program and based its request for applications on the HWI task force recommendations and the state's blueprints for policy and environmental changes to support physical activity and healthy eating. In addition, North Carolina Action for Healthy Kids selected two HWI recommendations as their objectives: policy standards for all foods available in schools and policies to establish adequate physical activity and physical education opportunities in schools. The HWI also includes efforts to promote the health of preschool children. For example, parents of preschool children, staff with the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and Child and Adult Care Food Program staff provided feedback to determine policy changes that would provide opportunities for more physical activity and healthy eating patterns for preschool children through WIC and child care. To support healthy environmental changes for preschool children, the Nutrition and Physical Activity Self Assessment for Child Care was developed and pilot tested in collaboration with the Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill. Child care centers were assessed, and center staff members attended training sessions on nutrition, physical activity, and childhood overweight. North Carolina linked the HWI with the North Carolina Healthy Child Care Initiative to carry out the program, which aims to make healthy environmental changes in 19 child care centers in 6 counties. Finally, to support changes in interpersonal behaviors, HWI partnered with North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Eat Smart, Move More, and the WIC program to provide consistent physical activity and healthy eating messages to young children and their parents in preschools and clinics. HWI helped train 85 county teams, who received Color Me Healthy materials and are now training local child care center staff. Use of these materials in WIC programs is now being pilot tested in six counties.

Implications and Impact

Continuous input from partners has made the North Carolina leadership plan more successful through every step of its development. Various partners already have stepped forward to carry out portions of the plan, expanding the reach of the state program beyond what it could have accomplished with its own resources. Involvement with partners has enhanced the preschool intervention's strength and its dissemination potential.