

Action Steps from September 15, 2004 Overweight Prevention Symposium: A Strategic Action Agenda

Sponsored by the King County Board of Health, Public Health-Seattle & King County,
and the University of Washington School of Public Health and Community Medicine

After hearing a plenary panel of four national experts on overweight prevention, 200 meeting participants were asked to divide into ten break-out sessions on five topics. The break-out sessions used the framework from the Washington State Nutrition and Physical Activity Plan and its overarching goals of increasing the proportion of residents with healthy diets and who get at least 30 minutes of moderate activity five days per week. Break-out sessions addressed the following topics:

- I. Increase access to healthy food for children, including promoting breast feeding;
- II. Increase access to healthy food for adults;
- III. Increase physical activity opportunities for children;
- IV. Increase physical activities for adults; and
- V. Increase community aspects that promote healthy living (land use).

Each break-out session reviewed existing evidence-based interventions and best practices on their topic and discussed additional activities that could be launched in King County in the next six to twelve months. Facilitators and recorders worked with the groups to create a total of 10 recommendations in these areas:

- A. Programs and policy changes in King County, including those that address the connections between overweight and poverty, economic and political issues.
- B. Consistent community messaging and education.
- C. Future research efforts, including those through academic, public health and community partnerships.

This document summarizes the top 10 lists from the five overweight prevention topics. For some topics, more than 10 recommendations are listed so that additional research ideas can be disseminated.

More information about the Overweight Prevention Symposium on 9/15/04 and on the topic of overweight prevention can be found at www.metrokc.gov/health/overweight.

I. Increase access to healthy food for children, including promoting breast feeding

A. Programs and policy changes in King County, including those that address the connections between overweight and poverty, economic and political issues.

1. Require and fund nutrition and health education programs in schools. For example, students should be taught nutrition in elementary schools as part of enrichment education, such as Mission Delicious.
2. Local government funding for children's programs should include nutritional standards for food served. This recommendation should be accomplished by partnering with food suppliers to provide healthy foods and by working with schools to have consistent nutritional standards for children. Similarly, partnerships with other children's programs should be undertaken to promote healthier food, i.e. Parks and Recreation programs, day care providers and others.
3. Provide parent education about healthy choices for children, e.g. snacks, drinks, and healthy kids' menus in restaurants.
4. Develop school menus that are more culturally appropriate—with better portion sizes, appeal and nutritional content.
5. Schools should work together to purchase healthy foods in bulk to increase their purchasing power and keep their costs down.
6. Food banks and their donor partners should work on promoting healthier foods for their users.
7. Schools should develop policies, including pricing, for “competitive foods” (such as candy, cookies, etc.) with input from youth.
8. More breast-feeding support programs should be developed, i.e. work site, La Leche League and others.

B. Consistent community messaging and education.

9. Develop consistent messages about the benefits of fruits and vegetables in all public children's programs, such as schools, WIC programs, parks and recreation programs, and school gardening programs. Consistent messages also should be used in private settings, such as daycare centers.
10. Use Public Service Announcements about nutrition on school TV channels and on local TV and cable channels.

C. Future research efforts, including those through academic, public health and community partnerships.

11. Evaluation research is needed for current programs, including:

- School and community garden programs,
- School breakfast programs,
- The Washington State fruit and vegetable pilot program, and
- Family support workers providing food to families.

II. Increase access to healthy food for adults

A. Programs and policy changes in King County, including those that address the connections between overweight and poverty, economic and political issues.

1. Improve access to healthy foods. For example, farmers markets could have low-cost or no-cost space rental in high need locations.
2. To make widespread changes, partnerships are needed. Food suppliers need to be involved, including vending machines, convenience stores, restaurants and grocery stores.
3. Improved labeling of foods in stores and restaurants is recommended to provide more comparison nutritional information to consumers.

B. Consistent community messaging and education.

4. Find messages that are culturally relevant to diverse communities.
5. Food messages for adults need to be positive, more about empowering than about negative messages.
6. Emphasize the value of good health, that it's OK take care of yourself and be good to yourself by eating well.

C. Future research efforts, including those through academic, public health and community partnerships.

7. More information is needed about the leverage points for behavior change. What are the sociological and other stressors that are barriers to self-care and weight management?
8. More information is needed about the cost-effectiveness of obesity treatment programs versus prevention programs.
9. Research on meaningful weight gain and weight loss messages for different subgroups of the population would be valuable.
10. More information about how and whether it is possible it is to eat healthy on a very low budget is sought.

3. Increase physical activity opportunities for children

A. Programs and policy changes in King County, including those that address the connections between overweight and poverty, economic and political issues.

1. Measure progress and mandate expectations about physical activity in schools. For example, should there be a physical fitness and nutrition component of the WASL? Ensure all kids can participate in physical education programs that consider the child's fitness level and weight. Physical education should emphasize lifetime fitness rather than exclusively sports training. At secondary levels, physical education can be run like a health and fitness facility with independent exercise programs and classes. In addition, use more intra-school volunteerism to assist with physical activity, such as older kids helping with gym classes for younger grades or walking younger kids to school.
2. Need to target physical activity interventions in high-need, underserved communities.
3. Integrate walking into bus routes, e.g. have "Park and Walks," where the kids walk the last half mile to school. Stagger school bus departures so children can "Stay and Play" after school.
4. Open school facilities on the evenings and weekends for the community.
5. Ensure all kids throughout the county have equal access to recreation league sports.
6. Have a King County Board of Health award for professional individuals and groups that lead school and community physical fitness activities.
7. Link with the corporate retail world to provide healthy role models in advertising.

B. Consistent community messaging and education.

8. Children should have reduced TV viewing time. Use consistent messages, such as "Children should have at least 30 minutes of exercise and no more than one or two hours of TV per day."
9. Target healthcare providers to address overweight stigma, use positive messages about fitness and assess body mass index.
10. Use consistent messages throughout King County, such as "Energize your life." Incorporate evidence into messaging about increasing physical activity for children. Focus on activity messages rather than weight. Target the entire family with physical activity messages, including adults. Emphasize physical fitness as a positive lifestyle choice. Use cultural competency to recognize social and cultural norms related to physical activity. Combine messages about nutrition and physical activity.

C. Future research efforts, including those through academic, public health and community partnerships.

11. What policy changes result in increased physical activity? More information about the effectiveness of institutional policies would be valuable, such as work place, child care and school policies.
12. Evaluation of interventions would be useful. For example, good measures are needed to evaluate whether changing physical education curriculum has an impact.
13. Greater understanding of the motivational approach is needed. Explore the best ways to conduct motivational interviewing.
14. Examine the relationship between obesity, behavior and productivity, such as reading.
15. Compare the differences in rates of overweight children in after-school programs versus children at home.
16. Study the validity of perceived safety and vulnerability, and the effects on children's outdoor physical activity.
17. Do long-term research on the ties between healthy behaviors as a child and as an adult.

4. Increase physical activity opportunities for adults

A. Programs and policy changes in King County, including those that address the connections between overweight and poverty, economic and political issues.

1. Use recreation centers and other community sites for physical activity. Examine ways to eliminate barriers to use of public and private facilities (schools, community centers, malls, work sites) for physical activity.
2. Encourage funding for recreational sites, including trails and parks.
3. Re-engage employers to promote physical activity through worksite wellness programs, including outreach and support for smaller employers to do so. Walking clubs and social support groups at work should be developed to help support physical activity. Build on existing organizations that promote physical activity, such as Volkssport, The Mountaineers Club, Tai-chi, and others. Engage employers through their efforts to restrain health benefits costs. Create financial incentives for employees to improve physical fitness, such as insurance discounts.
4. Build strategies that address psychosocial variables that hinder physical activity, such as shyness, bad experience with sports as children, use of car as a status symbol, etc. As another example, create systems of support, such as buddying and walking groups, to encourage physical activity and combat isolation among the elderly.
5. Build public-private partnerships to promote economically accessible programs for nutrition and exercise.

B. Consistent community messaging and education.

6. Develop a “from the top” county-wide media campaign to promote healthier communities.
7. Create messages that promote “healthy lifestyles,” rather than perpetuating the controversy between the roles of physical activity versus nutrition in weight gain. Encourage social norm change for physical activity. Activity is part of daily life, not just part of organized sports. Use intergenerational messages to increase physical activity for all family members. Encourage activity in all forms, use the broadest definition—walking, dancing!
8. Craft non-punitive messages that avoid stigma for high-risk communities.
9. Create a culture change regarding the amount and speed of driving.
10. Recognize competing marketing forces, offset these with competitive strategies.

D. Future research efforts, including those through academic, public health and community partnerships.

11. Conduct evaluations of existing interventions.
12. Provide more information about understanding motivational approaches, which are most effective when?
13. Involve diverse communities in developing options.
14. Study barriers for the most at-risk populations (proximity to facilities, time, etc.).
15. Do a case control study comparing employees who are given time to exercise with employees who have access to a gym but no explicit time to exercise.
16. Study the effects of bus pass benefits on health of employees. Do employees end up walking more?
17. What were the historical factors that used to promote more physical activity?

5. Increase community aspects that promote healthy living (land use).

A. Programs and policy changes in King County, including those that address the connections between overweight and poverty, economic and political issues.

1. Every land use policy should recognize and document public health impacts. Do a health assessment as well as environmental impact statement for all new development projects.
2. Expand state set-asides and commitment for active transportation. Invest in more and better walking and bike trails.
3. Look at ways to employ better density strategies, including the placement of community centers, which should be close and well connected to users.
4. Get kids and their advocates involved in land use planning.
5. Redevelop old spaces before designing new ones.

B. Consistent community messaging and education.

6. Change the community norms about driving too much and too fast. Weigh the trade-offs between convenience and improved quality of life. For example, to reduce reliance on cars “Driving too fast and too much” should carry the same social penalties as blowing smoke in someone’s face.
7. Take the lead from tobacco reduction—messages should be cutting edge, fun, and involve youth. Focus on what to do, not on the negative.
8. Create presentations on connectivity for legislative bodies.
9. Create messages about active community designs. Connected high-density can be healthy for all kinds of people—kids, seniors, everyone.

C. Future research efforts, including those through academic, public health and community partnerships.

10. Document the economic benefits of smart development and active communities.
11. Conduct research on use of health impact assessments in policy and planning decisions.
12. Compare property values over long periods in mixed use/dense areas versus single use/low density areas.