





# Energize our Community:

## TOOLKIT FOR ACTION



**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**  
**National Institutes of Health**

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute  
National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases  
National Institute of Child Health and Human Development  
National Cancer Institute



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# Chapter 1:

## INTRODUCTION



Welcome to **We Can!** (Ways to Enhance Children's Activity & Nutrition)— a collaboration between the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), and National Cancer Institute (NCI). **We Can!** is a national public education program to help prevent overweight and obesity. The program provides information and activities that encourage improved nutritional choices, increased physical activity, and reduced screen time in youth ages 8–13.

### **We Can!:** Responding to an Urgent National Problem

It seems as though everywhere you turn, someone is talking about the epidemic of overweight and obesity in America. Scientific organizations are issuing reports; television and newspapers are covering the story; and weight loss plans are everywhere. Why is everyone so concerned?

One reason is that the number of people—adults and children—who are overweight or obese has increased so rapidly in the past 30 years. It is estimated that 65 percent of adults in the United States are now overweight or obese. In addition, since the early 1970s, the number of overweight children ages 12–19 has doubled and the number of overweight children ages 6–11 has tripled. Today, more than 16 percent of young people ages 6–19 are overweight.

**To find out more about overweight and obesity in America, see the For More Information list on page 6.**

A second reason for concern is that the costs of obesity are so high, both in the short-term and over the long-term. In the short-term, being overweight can be inconvenient or uncomfortable. Clothes feel too tight, it's not easy for some to be too active, and one can tire easily. Over the long-term, overweight and obesity increase a person's risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, arthritis, sleep disorders, and social and psychological problems. One trend that is particularly alarming is the rapid increase in type 2 diabetes among young people. Once almost entirely a disease of adults, it is now estimated to account for 8 to 45 percent of newly diagnosed

diabetes cases in children and adolescents. Most cases of type 2 diabetes in children occur in those who are overweight.

A third reason for concern is that some groups in the United States are affected more severely than are others. Some racial and ethnic groups, people of lower socioeconomic status, and people who live in southern areas of the country tend to have higher rates of obesity than other groups, and these differences have increased over the last few years.

As part of NIH, NHLBI leads a national research program in diseases of the heart, blood vessels, lungs, and blood; sleep disorders; and blood resources. NHLBI is actively engaged in a number of programs to reduce heart disease risk factors and promote heart health. Obesity is an important focus of NHLBI's activities because of its association with heart disease, high blood pressure, and sleep problems. In 1991, NHLBI launched the Obesity Education Initiative. The overall purpose of this initiative is to help reduce the prevalence of overweight, obesity, and physical inactivity so as to decrease the number of people who develop heart disease.

Since 1999, NHLBI and the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) have collaborated on Hearts N' Parks, a community-based effort to encourage heart healthy eating and increased physical activity.

Programs and materials for recreation and park professionals to promote heart healthy eating and increased physical activity have been carried out in summer day camps, afterschool programs, senior centers, and community outreach centers in 50 Magnet Center sites and other communities throughout the country. **We Can!** is a natural outgrowth of this community-based effort. The focus is to leverage lessons learned and relationships established through Hearts N' Parks to extend programming to more communities throughout the country.

In early 2005, an NIH **We Can!** Work Group was formed to initiate the process of collaboration for **We Can!** programming across NIH Institutes and Centers. As noted above, the Work Group includes NHLBI, NIDDK, NICHD, and NCI. Each Institute has made a commitment to promoting the need for America's youth to maintain a healthy weight and has made valuable resources available to the **We Can!** program. See Appendix D for the materials order form.

## **We Can!** Audiences

**We Can!** is designed to reach young people ages 8–13 and their parents and primary caregivers. **We Can!** is focused on children and teens because preventing overweight and obesity in the early years can help young people stay healthy and can help prevent health problems in

adulthood. **We Can!** will encourage youth to:

- Choose a sufficient amount of a variety of fruits and vegetables per day.
- Decrease consumption of high-fat foods and energy-dense foods that are low in nutrient value.
- Enjoy small portions at home and at restaurants.
- Substitute water, fat-free milk, or low-fat milk for sweetened beverages.
- Engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate physical activity on most—preferably all—days of the week.
- Reduce sedentary activity by limiting screen time to no more than 2 hours per day.

**We Can!** is focused on parents and primary caregivers because they make a big difference in what children think and do. To a large extent, parents control what their children eat and how active they are. Parents and primary caregivers also are important role models. If they eat right and are physically active, chances are that their children will make these choices, too. In a nutshell, parents and primary caregivers are critical “change agents” for issues around food, physical activity, and weight. Moreover, engaging parents as well as children means that the whole family is involved. That’s a big help



because it's hard to make changes on one's own. Creating family habits around smart eating and physical activity can make it easier for everyone to maintain a healthy weight.

Studies suggest that parents are looking for help in managing weight issues for their children and families. Through programs, community events, and materials, **We Can!** can help parents and primary caregivers by encouraging them to:

- Increase the availability and accessibility of healthy foods in the home.
- Enjoy small portions at home and at restaurants.
- Limit the availability and accessibility in the home of sweetened beverages, high-fat foods, and energy-dense foods with low nutrient value.
- Support and enable family physical activity.
- Support and enable reduced screen time.

## **We Can! Elements**

Developed with help from researchers around the country and from NHLBI, NIDDK, NICHD, NCI, public health leaders, nutritionists and dietitians, health communicators, youth marketing experts, and community centers nationwide, **We Can!** has three major components:

- **COMMUNITY OUTREACH.** Community outreach is a key part of the **We Can!** program. Participating community sites will receive online access to all materials, including the program poster, a handbook designed for parents in both Spanish and English, local press releases, and other useful **We Can!** tools. By participating as a community site, you can extend the reach of **We Can!** messages throughout the country.
- **NATIONAL MEDIA AND MESSAGES.** To assist your media efforts, **We Can!** has a variety of materials in English and Spanish, such as radio and print public service advertisements, a brochure for parents, and a consumer Web site. In addition, NIH will conduct national and local media outreach to promote **We Can!** messages that motivate youth and their parents or primary caregivers to take individual and community action to maintain a healthy weight. Media outreach will begin at the launch of the campaign, but will be sustained to ensure that parents and caregivers are receiving practical tips and tools to ultimately improve their family's health.
- **PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT.** Recognizing the important role that national and local organizations can play in supporting and extending program messages and strategies, **We Can!** will work with a select group of national organizations, including health professional associations, as well as corporate,

media, and Federal partners, to reach **We Can!** audiences. The program will help partner organizations tailor their programs and promotions to include **We Can!** materials, messages, and activities.

## The Benefits of Participating in **We Can!**

**We Can!** provides participating community centers with access to a variety of materials, as well as information on working with the media and partners. By participating, you also have access to tools and information that will assist you in carrying out community programs that focus on obesity prevention and health promotion. This healthy weight public education outreach effort benefits your community in several important ways. **We Can!** participating communities:

- Serve as a model community for obesity prevention efforts around the country.
- Receive media recognition for your efforts.
- Help to lead the Nation's fight against youth overweight and obesity.
- Receive organizational recognition as a leader in the community.
- Help to reduce the burden of chronic disease in the community.

## The **We Can!** Energize Our Community: Toolkit for Action

This **We Can! Energize Our Community: Toolkit for Action** provides an overview of **We Can!** and how your community can get involved. It's organized around four Ps:

- **PEOPLE.** **We Can!** is a unique approach to reducing and preventing obesity. This section describes the people who get involved and the roles they play.
- **PROGRAMS.** The community outreach component of **We Can!** consists of Youth Programs, Parent Programs, and Community Events and Projects. This section describes these elements and how they work together.
- **PUBLIC VISIBILITY AND WORKING WITH MEDIA.** Raising awareness about **We Can!** and its messages are an important element of the program's success. This section gives you tools and strategies to work with the media to increase awareness about **We Can!**
- **PARTNERING.** Working with other groups can help you make the most of **We Can!** This section provides suggestions on effective partnering.

## For More Information About Overweight and Obesity

Koplan, J.P., Liverman, C.T., & Kraak, V.I. (Eds.). *Preventing childhood obesity: Health in the balance*. Washington (DC): The National Academies Press, Institute of Medicine, 2005.

Ogden, C.L., Carroll, M.D., & Flegal, K.M. Epidemiologic trends in overweight and obesity. *Endocrinology and Metabolic Clinics of North America* 2003;32(4):741–760.

Ogden, C.L., Flegal, K.M., Carroll, M.D., & Johnson, C.L. Prevalence and trends in overweight among U.S. children and adolescents, 1999–2000. *JAMA* 2002;288(14):1728–1732.

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Overweight and Obesity Web site. [www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/index.htm)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Surgeon General's call to action to prevent and decrease overweight and obesity. Rockville, MD: DHHS, Public Health Service, Office of the Surgeon General, 2001. [www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/obesity](http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/obesity)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture (HHS/USDA). Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2005. [www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines](http://www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines)



## Chapter 2:

# PEOPLE

The common element of every human service agency, and the starting point for all programs developed for the public, is people. Because **We Can!** is all about making life better for people and helping them make good decisions for their health, the first P of **We Can!** has to be People.

Every member of the community has the potential to play a role and be involved with **We Can!**, though two groups are especially important:

- People who serve as the support and delivery system for the program.
- People who participate in the program and the broader general public.

### People Who Support and Deliver **We Can!**

To develop and maintain **We Can!** programs in your organization, you'll need the help and support of many people. These groups include *decision-makers*, such as agency managers, board members, and elected officials, and *staff*, including full- and part-time workers, support and frontline staff, and volunteers.



You'll need to start by helping decision-makers and staff learn about and become engaged in this initiative. The more they know about and participate in the planning and development of the initiative, the more support you'll get from this all-important group. Here are some ways to make sure that decision-makers and staff are on-board and ready to help:

- Providing orientations so that people know the facts about **We Can!** and obesity prevention as well as the four Ps of **We Can!**
- Brainstorming and program planning to help staff identify ways in which they can bring **We Can!** to participants and the general public.
- Training staff in methods to incorporate obesity prevention activities into their programs.
- Involving staff in selecting resources, such as those available from NHLBI, to assist them in achieving program goals.
- Assisting staff in selecting programs to be used in outcomes assessment activities and in conducting assessments.
- Enabling staff to take part in various health-promoting nutrition and physical activity programs that your organization offers.

## People Who Participate and the General Public

Once your internal support system is in place, you can begin to define your participants and recruit their participation.

Traditional program models tend to focus on people who are currently enrolled or involved in programs and services that relate to the one being developed. Because those people are right there in front of you, it is easy to assume that they are the only ones you should reach out to. But think more broadly—just about everyone has the potential to become involved in community activities, so expand your target group. Consider going after other participant groups who have, or may potentially have, a relationship with your organization:

- **CURRENT PARTICIPANTS.** People who currently participate in your programs, whether they be focused on healthy eating and physical activity or not. People who already take aerobics or healthy cooking classes may naturally gravitate toward **We Can!** activities, but people who take crafts classes or participate in other types of programs that are unrelated to nutrition or physical activity also may want to participate in **We Can!**

- **CASUAL PARTICIPANTS.** People who are not formally involved in any specific programs. Some may be regular users of your facilities but on a drop-in or informal basis. Others may be secondary participants who know about your programs through the participation of children or friends.
- **POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS.** Members of the general public who are not currently involved or even aware of your programs and services.

By focusing your attention on cultivating current participants as well as reaching out to casual and potential participants, you can increase the range of participants in **We Can!** Just think of all those people who stop by your community center to attend a civic meeting, or who are dropping off their children for an activity and would welcome something interesting to do while they wait for their child!

## ? Did You Know

- About 22 percent of American adults report regular, sustained physical activity of any intensity lasting 30 minutes or more five times a week.
- About 25 percent report no leisure-time physical activity.
- Sixty percent or more don't achieve the recommended amount of daily physical activity.

*Don't be fooled by the waiting lists for gymnastics classes and long lines during the late afternoon or early evening hours in your fitness center. Those crowds don't mean you've reached everyone. Reaching out to casual or potential participants can do much to get people involved and help them achieve the **We Can!** physical activity objective.*

## **We Can! Checklist: 1st P—People**

- Put together a **We Can!** overview packet consisting of general information and frequently asked questions (FAQs) to share with potential supporters of the program. Review talking points for your conversations with them.
- Meet with program staff to explain **We Can!** Solicit their support and ideas for carrying out program activities. Assign roles and responsibilities among your staff.
- Orient your organization's decision-makers to **We Can!** Secure their support and participation.
- Make a list of current partners who might be interested in **We Can!**
- Work with program staff to brainstorm a list of other potential partners and collaborators in **We Can!**
- Meet with program staff to describe the various groups of participants and identify strategies for reaching out to all of them.
- Ask staff to identify ways to keep **We Can!** moving forward once the program has been launched.
- Keep staff and partners informed about current **We Can!** programs and activities:
  - Give management written reports and verbal updates.
  - Provide regular updates to your staff.
  - Present reports at board or council meetings.



## Chapter 3:

# PROGRAMS

**We Can!** community outreach programs have three major elements: Youth Programs, Parent Programs, and Community Events and Projects. All focus on helping youth achieve the five **We Can!** behavioral objectives, improving the capacity of parents and families to help their children achieve these objectives, and building community support around health-promoting nutrition and physical activity. We encourage communities to implement at least 1 youth program and 1 parent program, with a minimum of 15 participants each, as well as 1 community event or project.

### Youth Programs

Communities that participate in **We Can!** have the option of using a variety of curricula and programs designed for youth. Each has a unique focus, but all are designed to teach young people about nutrition and physical activity issues and become more aware of the factors that influence their eating and activity behaviors. All of them also have gone through a rigorous development and evaluation process, and they have been shown to positively affect the





knowledge and behavior of young people. You can conduct these programs in their entirety or select portions of them if that works better for your organization. The programs are self-explanatory and easy-to-implement. Here are three programs you may want to consider:



- **CATCH KIDS CLUB.** The Child and Adolescent Trial for Cardiovascular Health (CATCH) was an NHLBI-funded study to create a school health education curriculum designed to motivate heart healthy behavior in children in grades K–5. CATCH Kids Club, based on the successful in-school program, is a physical activity and nutrition education program for elementary school-aged children (grades K–5) in *afterschool* and *summer care settings*. In 1999, the program name was changed to a *Coordinated Approach to Child Health* to reflect the shift from a research trial to a proven, sustainable program. Both the original school-based CATCH and CATCH Kids Club use a coordinated approach to helping children adopt healthy dietary and physical activity behaviors by positively changing the health environments of recreation programs, schools, and homes.



The CATCH Kids Club consists of three programmatic elements: a curricular component, a physical activity component, and a snack component. The field-tested

materials include a CATCH Kids Club Activity Box, which contains activities for afterschool and community-based programs, and a binder with nutrition activities and snack recipes.

CATCH Kids Club has been extensively tested in 16 pilot sites—8 in El Paso and 8 in Austin, Texas. Afterschool staff also were trained by and implemented the program with assistance from the CATCH trainers. The results showed that CATCH Kids Club works—it has been kid-tested and approved, it is inclusive (everybody plays), and it has been demonstrated to increase children’s physical activity and their nutrition knowledge and intentions. CATCH Kids Club activities are designed to attract children—to get them to make the choice to participate because the games are fun. The variety of activities is a strength of the program. Lastly, CATCH Kids Club is easy to use—it provides the information and resource materials to assist afterschool staff and counselors to successfully integrate structured activities and nutrition lessons into their programs.

[www.catch-works.com](http://www.catch-works.com)

- **MEDIA-SMART YOUTH: EAT, THINK, AND BE ACTIVE!** is a 10-lesson curriculum funded by the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) that focuses on helping young people

ages 11–13 understand the connections between media and health. The program uses nutrition and physical activity examples to help youth learn about these connections and build their media analysis skills. Media-Smart Youth brings together a mix of learning formats, including brainstorming, small- and large-group discussions, games, and creative productions. All these activities are intended to create discussion and encourage problem-solving and critical thinking. The curriculum includes 10 structured lessons with activities that explore media, nutrition, or physical activity topics. Each lesson also includes a *Snack Break* and an *Action Break*. These breaks reflect the nutrition and physical activity content of the curriculum and provide a fun, hands-on way to experience these concepts. The curriculum concludes with a Big Production—an opportunity for participants to use what they have learned to create a media project designed to motivate other young people to take action for better nutrition or increased physical activity. In the process, the youth learn new skills in production, teamwork, and creativity.

[www.nichd.nih.gov](http://www.nichd.nih.gov)

- **STUDENT MEDIA AWARENESS TO REDUCE TELEVISION (S.M.A.R.T.)** is a 3rd or 4th grade classroom curriculum designed to motivate children to reduce their television

watching and video game usage. Studies conducted by Stanford University researchers have shown that reducing time spent watching television and playing video games can result in lower prevalence of childhood obesity as well as less aggression in children. The S.M.A.R.T. curriculum was successfully tested with elementary schools in the San Francisco Bay area. The curriculum is intended to be used over the course of the school year and includes all the lesson plans and tools needed to implement the program.

<http://hprc.stanford.edu/pages/store/default.asp>

Many other nutrition and physical activity programs for youth are also available. Here are a few possibilities you may want to consider using in whole or part:

- **THE POWER OF CHOICE.** An afterschool program developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration [www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources/power\\_of\\_choice.html](http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources/power_of_choice.html)
- **JUMPSTART.** A program for elementary school-aged children developed by NHLBI and the National Recreation and Park Association in collaboration with *Scholastic* magazine [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/prof/heart/other/jumpstrt.htm](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/prof/heart/other/jumpstrt.htm)



S.M.A.R.T.

- **PLANET HEALTH.** An interdisciplinary program for 6th through 8th grade students. The research behind Planet Health was supported by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). [www.hsph.harvard.edu/prc/proj\\_planet.html](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/prc/proj_planet.html).

## Parent Programs

**We Can!** also includes several program elements designed to help parents and caregivers help their children improve their nutrition and physical activity choices. These options include:

- **We Can! Energize Our Families: Curriculum for Parents and Caregivers** is a six-lesson curriculum that covers the basics of maintaining a healthy weight. The core concept is “energy balance,” or the long-term balance between ENERGY IN (calories from food) and ENERGY OUT (calories burned through physical activity). In a fun and hands-on way, the lessons focus on helping participants learn essential skills that can help their families make healthful food choices and become more physically active. At the end of each meeting, participants are encouraged to try new nutrition and physical activity tips with their families. At the next lesson, participants share their experiences trying the new behavior with the group. The parent curriculum is in Appendix A.

- The **We Can!** Web site at <http://wecan.nhlbi.nih.gov> is a one-stop resource for parents and caregivers for information, tips, and resources on ways they can help their family maintain a healthy weight by improving their nutrition, increasing physical activity, and reducing screen time. Community centers also can logon to download information and materials, learn about best practices from **We Can!** sites around the country, and contribute their own stories. In addition, the site will list and recognize national partners who are helping contribute to **We Can!** success.

### **TELL US ABOUT IT.**

Let us know about a successful event in your community. Logon to the **We Can!** Web site, <http://wecan.nhlbi.nih.gov>, and go to the “**We Can! Get Involved**” page to learn how to send us your program description.

- The **We Can! Families Finding the Balance: A Parent Handbook** provides much of the same information as that contained in the curriculum. Its information, tips, and “For More Information”

guides make this brochure a valuable take-home piece for any parent or primary caregiver interested in helping their family maintain a healthy weight. The handbook will be available in English and Spanish and is available on the **We Can!** Web site, <http://wecan.nhlbi.nih.gov>. You can also call 1-866-35-WECAN to order copies.

## Community Events

Behavior change is often difficult. One thing that can help, though, is a supportive environment. Getting the larger community aware of the importance of healthy eating and increased physical activity and involved in **We Can!** activities can reinforce positive behaviors and make it easier for people to maintain behavior changes. See Appendix A for suggestions for possible **We Can!** community events and projects, helpful tips, and planning tools.

## Supplement We Can! Programs and Activities

Your organization might be comfortable using only **We Can!** activities and curricula. Or you might want to make all of your activities part of **We Can!** Here are some tips and strategies for making the most of **We Can!**

**Infuse We Can! Messages and Activities into All Your Programs**  
Include a **We Can!** angle in all your programs—whether they are focused on health or not:

- Have participants in exercise classes monitor their pulse periodically.
- Suggest that summer camp staff serve water, fat-free milk, or low-fat milk instead of other beverages, and low-fat snacks that focus on fruits and vegetables.
- Have instructors begin or end any class sessions with a nutrition or physical activity tip.

### Take Advantage of “National Health Observance Month” Opportunities

To leverage existing health events or occasions, plan activities to coincide with National Cholesterol Education Month or National Nutrition Month. These activities can be used to help people boost their activity levels or make healthy food and drink choices. Here are a few occasions to get you started:

- March is National Nutrition Month.
- May is
  - National Physical Fitness and Sports Month.
  - National High Blood Pressure Education Month.
- September is National Cholesterol Education Month.
- November is National Diabetes Awareness Month.

### Suggest Alternatives

- Substitute soccer for softball to get more participants actively involved in the game.
- Encourage parents to join in during a session of playground games.
- Serve bite-sized healthy snacks at camp or social meetings.
- Encourage concessionaires to provide a wider range of low-fat, low-calorie snacks, meals, and beverages.
- Suggest new activities to people who might be bored with what they've been doing (for example, encourage treadmill fans to try cycling or hiking).

### Offer People Opportunities to Become Involved in **We Can!** Programs and Activities

Think of these opportunities as introductory versions of programs that are designed to attract people who might lack the time, money, interest, or level of commitment needed to adopt a healthier lifestyle. Possibilities that might work for parents as well as young people include:

- **OFFER A TASTE OF ONE OR MORE OF YOUR PROGRAMS.** These “mini-classes” can be a successful hook to draw people into the full program.

- **HOLD A GET STARTED SERIES OF PROGRAMS.** These could include “getting started” on increasing physical activity, eating healthfully at fast food restaurants, or choosing active alternatives to screen time.
- **HOLD A SPECIAL EVENT.** For example, you could sponsor a “Get Ready for Summer” event in which parents and children try out the various physical activities sponsored by your organization.
- **REACH OUT.** Sometimes, the people most in need of **We Can!** programs and activities are the least likely to sign up. Don't wait for them to come to you. Find a way to go to them where they are comfortable and accessible.

### Help People Through the Tough Times

- People always will drop out of programs or get discouraged and slip back into old behaviors. Often they feel bad about it but think they can't start over. Make sure you reach out to them and try to get them back.
- Continue to provide information and program options to help break through barriers to physical activity and healthy eating.
- Help organize walking clubs, cooking programs, health events, and family activities—any way to get people involved and help them support and encourage others.

## Discover Program Opportunities

Consider completing the following checklist on page 18. It will give you an initial picture of what is happening (or not happening) in terms of nutrition, physical activity, and overweight prevention activities in your community. It can serve as a good starting point for planning your **We Can!** programs and activities. Review the results of this assessment with your staff and partners to identify gaps and duplications. By not replicating similar programs that already exist, you can save time, energy, and money. By offering programs at different times and locations for different groups of people, you might help people break through barriers that are preventing them from adopting nutrition and physical activity behaviors that help them maintain a healthy weight.

## Evaluation

Your ability to demonstrate the impact of your program on the health of your community is a big plus. Evaluations enable you to:

- Document the factual results of your programs.
- Determine if your programs and services are making a difference to your community.
- Provide information for decision-makers, funding sources, and the public.
- Suggest how to improve your programs.
- Reinforce the efforts of staff.

The **We Can!** Web site at <http://wecan.nhlbi.nih.gov> provides information and sample instruments to help you evaluate the youth and parent programs. Suggestions for evaluating community events and projects can be found in Appendix A.

# Program Assessment Checklist

## People

Groups who do NOT have regular, ongoing opportunities to learn about nutrition and healthful eating.

- |          |          |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 4. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 5. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 6. _____ |
- 

Groups who do NOT have regular, ongoing opportunities for physical activity.

- |          |          |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 4. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 5. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 6. _____ |
- 

Groups who are at risk of overweight and are not participating in current programs.

- |          |          |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 4. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 5. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 6. _____ |

## Programs

Successful programs with a **We Can!** focus that could be expanded to reach more people.

- |          |          |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 4. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 5. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 6. _____ |
- 

Programs with potential for adding or enhancing **We Can!** elements for current participants.

- |          |          |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 4. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 5. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 6. _____ |

Programs without a **We Can!** focus that could be expanded to include physical activity and healthful nutrition.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

**We Can!** information and strategies that are NOT sufficiently targeted and could be expanded (check as many as apply):

- Information:**
- Importance of maintaining a healthy weight and preventing overweight
  - Role of food choices, physical activity, and screen time in preventing or causing overweight
  - Ways to maintain a healthy weight

- Activity:**
- Improving food choices
  - Increasing physical activity
  - Reducing screen time

**Opportunities/Action Areas**

Identify programs or services, existing or new, that present an opportunity for motivating healthy weight behaviors or areas where new programs should be created.

Target Group or Program	Expanding an Existing Program	Creating a New Program



## **We Can! Checklist: 2nd P—Programs**

- Create opportunities for staff to become familiar with the **We Can!** youth and parent curricula and elements.
- Develop plans and schedules for implementing **We Can!** curricula and activities.
- Brainstorm ways that **We Can!** concepts can be incorporated into your center's other existing programs.
- Involve staff in identifying other programs and activities that might lend themselves to **We Can!**
- Identify ways in which program activities can be adapted to support healthy eating and physical activity.
- Create a plan for adding **We Can!** themes or activities to existing programs.
- Identify high-potential programs, such as afterschool, day camp, or senior meals, where **We Can!** can be incorporated.
- Create a schedule and strategy for carrying out these plans and assign staff as appropriate.
- Ask staff to identify possible barriers to participation in programs and suggest ways to break down those barriers.



# Chapter 4:

## PUBLIC VISIBILITY AND WORKING WITH MEDIA

One of the most important challenges you face is raising awareness about the problems associated with overweight in youth and highlighting the things **We Can!** is doing to help young people and their families prevent overweight. The success of your program depends in part on people knowing about it. Here are some approaches you can take to show people in your community how you are working to improve their health.

### Get the Word Out

- Use **We Can!** resources to reinforce the key program messages within your organization. Try to have the messages incorporated into vehicles such as flyers and bulletin boards, printed forms, outgoing voicemail messages, e-mail signatures, and personal contacts.
- Extend your reach to the broader community. For example, disseminate information about **We Can!** activities through posters hung in local recreational facilities near restrooms and refreshment areas, fact sheets in high-traffic locations, brochures at community events, and flyers in the mail that accompany local utility bills.



- Disseminate through civic organizations, partnering organizations, schools, churches, local businesses (including grocery stores)—both to clients/consumers and to employees.
- Contact local community colleges or get marketing students involved.
- Remember to include information about your **We Can!** activities on your organization’s Web site. Be sure to keep event information updated. Also, remind your partners to keep information current on their Web sites and send them a link to your Web page and to the national **We Can!** Web site, <http://wecan.nhlbi.nih.gov>.

## Whom to Reach and Where to Reach Them

- **YOUTH.** Recreation centers, parks, malls, and other locations where they come for activities or to hang out with friends.
- **PARENTS.** Bulletin boards outside buildings or rooms where they drop off children (community centers, schools, local pools) or at pediatrician’s offices.

Take-home flyers or forms from schools, churches, and community centers.

- **FAMILIES.** Signs at family picnic spots, community spots, or child play areas.

Signs at youth sports games, local festivals.

Hold a special event at which you can feature **We Can!** such as a health and wellness fair, an awards ceremony, or a holiday celebration. Or you may want to combine a **We Can!** promotion with another community event.

## Work With the Media

Working with the media can raise the visibility of your organization or coalition and help to set the stage for recruiting participants, partners, and sponsors. Media coverage is an integral way to relay **We Can!** messaging in your community. The following section is designed to help you work with the media to effectively promote your program. Here are some strategies for working with the media:

- First, develop a media strategy.
  - **Define your goal.** Are you trying to recruit participants to programs, draw attendance at an event, or inform potential participants or sponsors?
  - **Think about which audiences you want to target.** If your goal is to recruit program participants, do you want to reach children or adults?

Do you want to reach individuals of certain ethnic or cultural backgrounds or from a specific socioeconomic class or neighborhood?

- **Develop an appropriate message and call to action.**  
Try to identify one key message (the main point you want to get across) and one call to action (what you want your audience to do, such as register for a program or come to an event). The idea here is to not try to communicate too many concepts at once—that can make it hard to communicate the key messages and action items.
- **Create a targeted media list.**  
A media list is often the foundation of your media outreach. Identifying the right reporters with the right beats is crucial. When possible, find out how they prefer to be contacted (e-mail, phone, fax) and respect their preferences. It also is important to understand the outlet you are contacting. Remember to include contacts for your local papers, radio, and TV.
- **Identify the people in your department or agency who are best able to serve as media contacts and spokesperson(s).**  
Make sure they are very familiar with **We Can!**, its NIH sponsors, and all the **We Can!** activities your center is doing.
- Prepare the tools you need to inform the media effectively. These include press releases, fact sheets, brochures, or other background information. If you're planning an event, you might also need a media advisory as well as a press kit. Press kits often include a press release, an event agenda, backgrounders on **We Can!** and your organization, short bios of speakers, and copies of their speeches. Remind people that this information will be on the **We Can!** Web site. (See sample media materials in Appendix B.)
- One of the most important media tools is the press release because much of the news that is printed or broadcast comes from this source. It tells your story in a news article format and mirrors how reporters draft articles. In some cases, it may be printed or broadcast verbatim. Most likely, a reporter will use only portions of the release and supplement it with additional information from other sources. Here are some tips for writing an effective news release:
  - Write a headline that tells the story.
  - Prepare a lead paragraph that includes “the five Ws and H”—who, what, when, where, why and how.

- Include accurate information from reputable sources, with the most important details in the first few paragraphs. Where possible, include local statistics (e.g., one of four children in Healthy County are overweight, according to the Healthy County Health Department).
- Use quotes that bring the story to life. Consider composing draft quotes that are approved by the people for whom the quotes are written.
- Limit the release to no more than two pages. If mailing or faxing, present it on letterhead with the name and phone number of your organization's contact person, include the date (or the date that the media can report on the information), and any sponsors of the activity. If sending by e-mail, copy the text of the release into the body of the e-mail rather than sending it as an attachment.
- Avoid passive voice. Use active words and voice to add zest to your writing.
- Proofread to ensure that it contains no errors.
- Construct a timetable of your site's events and activities and include that in materials you send out to the media.
- Decide how you will measure the success of your outreach efforts. How many people participated in your program or event? How many newspapers, TV stations, and other media outlets reported on your program as a result of your outreach?
- Maintain ongoing contact with media sources. It's important to capture media attention when launching a new project like **We Can!** It is equally important to try to keep the message and activities of **We Can!** in the public eye. Here are some ways to ensure ongoing successful media contacts:
  - Keep your media contacts and spokespeople informed about new **We Can!** developments and activities.
  - Ask local officials to proclaim your city, town, or county a **We Can!** community and encourage the media to cover it. Include a copy of the proclamation with your press release.
  - Distribute **We Can!** materials at every appropriate public event. Try to keep your materials recognizable with a standard design or logo. (See Appendix D for the **We Can!** Logo Guidelines.)

- Pitch ideas for a feature article or broadcast segment to select media. The focus of the article or segment could be a program participant who has been exceptionally successful, a volunteer who has contributed significantly, or an organizational sponsor that has contributed generously.
- Grow your media network and develop strategies to reach various sections of the newspaper (such as sports, lifestyle, parenting, health, kids' page, weekend, or activity section) as well as radio stations that attract different groups of listeners. For example, include tips for reducing children's screen time in outreach to lifestyle or parenting reporters. In addition, keep track of reporters and freelancers who cover related stories, and add their names to your list of media contacts.
- Remember Web sites that list local events and send them links to your Web site. Also, note that sometimes newspapers, television, and radio stations have separate staff who manage their online content, so be sure to notify both departments.
- Try to find media that appeal to individuals or nonparticipants you want to reach. Identify new media possibilities by reading neighborhood or small weekly newspapers and listening to various radio stations.
- Invite members of the media to become partners with your **We Can!** program. Local TV and radio stations as well as newspapers often adopt special causes to show their support for the community.
- When it comes to pitching, remember that more does not always equal better. Reporters constantly receive story ideas, and repeated attempts to gain media coverage can backfire. When you contact reporters, be sure you have a newsworthy idea they might be interested in and make their job easier by providing them with all the information they need. Remember media like photos, so offer a photo opportunity or visual.

See Appendix B for sample media materials and "How To" guides to help promote **We Can!** in your community.

## **We Can!** Checklist: 3rd P—Public Visibility and Working With Media

- Create or revise a list of media contacts and information (phone number, e-mail, fax, etc.).
- Identify media tools you'll need—such as a media advisory, press releases, and background fact sheets. Create a media schedule, then draft and distribute these items. Be sure to update them as needed.
- Schedule a date and time for community officials to proclaim your community a **We Can!** community, then arrange for media coverage. Be sure to have program participation at any press event as it provides media with people to interview as well as a strong human interest angle.
- Extend your reach by partnering with local organizations or businesses and promoting **We Can!** to their constituents.
- Think of different story ideas with a local angle or human interest angle and pitch them to your media contacts. These should be targeted; do not send the same pitch letter to several media outlets.
- Expand your reach by contacting the people who write for the sports, parenting, or lifestyle sections of local newspapers. Then, be creative and develop different story ideas that are relevant to each section. Contact a variety of radio stations.
- Invite the media to cover special **We Can!** events and become involved.
- Check the **We Can!** Web site and alert local media contacts to new findings or program developments. Provide them with a local angle if you can.



# Chapter 5:

## PARTNERING

One of the powerful aspects of **We Can!** is its potential to maximize existing community resources and to use them as channels to disseminate important information to your community. Partnering goes a long way toward making that potential a reality.

### Assess the Strengths and Limitations of Partnerships

Partners can bring something to the process that you are not capable of providing. Partnerships are powerful because they extend your network by making things happen that could not have happened—or as efficiently—with one agency working on its own. Partners can be a big help in moving a **We Can!** project forward because they offer:

- Access to a group of people you might not be currently reaching
- Greater credibility for your message or program
- Additional resources (funding, staff, facilities, equipment)





- Added expertise
- Potential co-sponsorship of programs and events

It's important to remember, though, that partnerships can't do everything. They cannot:

- Substitute for your own clear strategic thinking
- Be an end in themselves
- Change the behavior of an audience
- Keep everyone happy

## Consider Potential Partners

The best partners are those who share a common interest in your mission, strategies, values, and vision. Every community possesses a unique richness of resources that can serve as potential **We Can!** partners. In thinking of potential partners, take a moment to brainstorm the names of individuals and agencies that might be interested in being a part of **We Can!** Think of organizations or groups you might not have been involved with previously, such as hospitals, grocery stores, the health department, or fitness centers. Ask other staff or any current partners for additions to your potential partner list. Consider the following:

- Public departments and agencies, such as health departments, school districts, policy departments, or

fire departments

- Health-related agencies, hospitals, visiting nurses, and emergency services
- Nonprofit agencies, YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, Girl Scouts, Boys Scouts
- Faith-based organizations
- Private sector groups, such as grocery stores, sporting goods stores, or fitness centers
- Neighborhood groups and local PTAs

## Decide on the Why and What of Partnerships

In thinking of potential partners, also take a moment to brainstorm the reasons for forming a partnership with a particular organization or person. Having a clear purpose will help you determine the kinds of activities that are appropriate for the partnership. Here are some possible purposes and related activities (note that some activities can serve several purposes):

- To reach particular groups or audiences:
  - Co-host an event or press conference
  - Jointly publish materials

- Contribute to each other's publications
- Cosponsor a program or activity
- Serve on an advisory group or program planning team
- To disseminate materials and messages:
  - Co-host an event or press conference
  - Jointly publish materials
  - Contribute to each other's publications
  - Cosponsor a program or activity
  - Tap into each other's dissemination channels
- To gain technical expertise to enhance your programs and activities:
  - Receive production assistance
  - Swap staff
  - Tap the partner's expertise for a briefing or when developing materials
  - Receive logistical support

## Find the Right Partner

Finding the right partner can sometimes make all the difference in a successful **We Can!** effort. Consider the following criteria. Which will your partners need to meet?

- To enhance credibility for your programs or activities:
  - Co-host an event or press conference
  - Jointly publish materials
  - Contribute to each other's publications
  - Cosponsor a program or activity
  - Serve on an advisory group or program planning team
- The credibility, name recognition and scope, and extent to which its mission complements your **We Can!** programs and objectives.
- The profile of the organization's key constituencies (do they complement or extend yours?).
- The ability and commitment of the organization's leadership to leverage or mobilize its network and resources on your behalf.
- The extent to which the organization traditionally has been involved with, or desires to become involved with, nutrition, physical activity, and healthy weight issues.

- Whether a collaboration with the organization results in a win-win situation for everyone involved.

Here are some things you can do to ensure successful partnerships:

- Involve representatives of partnering organizations as early as possible in the planning process.
- Provide partners with the **We Can!** mission, strategies, and materials in a readily usable format.
- Give partners advance notice of upcoming activities so they can rework their program schedules around those activities.
- Determine what types of resources or assistance they might provide or need, including money, training, information, or facilities.
- Keep initial efforts manageable; don't take on too much too soon.
- Create a way to gently remind people of their responsibilities.
- Develop a feedback mechanism so activities can stay on track and adjustments can be made quickly.

## Move Forward With Your Partners

Before you and your partners decide to create new programs, you need to look at those you currently offer. Conduct a quick assessment of your **We Can!** nutrition, physical activity, and screen time reduction programs and activities and determine whether all members of the community have access to the programs. Are your existing programs:

- Designed for parents and primary caregivers, young people ages 8–13, and families?
- Offered at various locations around the community?
- Offered at various days and times?
- Accessible to all members of the community?
- Affordable?

The following chart can help you and your partners review your existing programs to see where gaps may exist that can be filled with a new, collaborative effort that incorporates **We Can!** messages and elements.

Step 1: Current Programs and Services Offered		
1.	6.	11.
2.	7.	12.
3.	8.	13.
4.	9.	14.
5.	10.	15.

**Step 2: Review Programs** on the basis of which audiences are addressed. Be sure to classify the programs according to whether they focus on nutrition, physical activity, and screen time, or whether these topics are only a small part of the program. This chart allows you to see what elements might be missing from current programs and can help you determine opportunities for partnering with other organizations.

Program Name	Primary Audience	Primary Focus			Minor Focus		
		Nutrition (N)	Physical Activity (PA)	Screen Time (ST)	Nutrition (N)	Physical Activity (PA)	Screen Time (ST)

Once you know in what areas you might want to collaborate with a partner, a good way to keep a partnership on track is to develop a structured plan. Such a partnership plan enables all participants to agree on the specifics of the project and

roles and responsibilities. How formal the plan is depends on the size of the cooperative effort and the needs of the partners. The following partnership plan template can help get you started.

## A Partnership Plan

### Overall Purpose of the **We Can!** Partnership

To bring together existing community resources and assets to improve the overall health and quality of life for residents of the community through increased information about nutrition, physical activity, and maintaining a healthy weight.

### Brief Description of Cooperative Program or Project


### Participating Partners (list all names and organizations)


### Desired Outcomes of the Program/Project

(may include a focus on a particular group, skill set, behavior, or area of knowledge.)


### Major Activities for Program/Project

1.
2.
3.
4.

Needed Resources			
Resource	Who Provides	Details	Timing
Access to people			
Training			
Communication			
Expertise			
Facility			
Funding			
Staff			
Action Steps			
Step	Who is Responsible	Due Date	How Tracked

## Assess Your Ongoing Partnerships

As in any relationship, it's always a good idea for you to pause once in a while and assess how the partnership is going. The following tool can help you evaluate the strengths, accomplishments, and difficulties

of your partnership. By using it, you can ensure that you and your partner are working from the same page and are meeting the original goals of the alliance. It also will give you concrete information to work with if you need to make some adjustments and improvements. Be as specific as you can in answering the questions.

Perception of Vision and Roles	
1. What is the name of your organization?	
2. What is the name of your partner organization?	
3. In two or three sentences, describe what you and your partner are trying to accomplish.	
4. What is your organization's role in the partnership?	
5. What is your partner's role in the partnership?	
6. What resources have you invested so far in the partnership?	
Funding:	
Staff:	
Materials:	
Other:	
7. What resources has your partner invested so far in the partnership?	
Funding:	
Staff:	
Materials:	
Other:	

## Satisfaction

8. Do you feel that you and your partner organization are committed to shared goals? What might help improve this aspect of the partnership?
9. Do you feel that your partnership has direction and a cohesive design? What might help improve this aspect of the partnership?
10. What do you feel have been the biggest strengths of this partnership, in terms of its outcomes, processes, or any other perspective that you think is important?
11. What areas do you feel need the most improvement or are the greatest challenges in this partnership, in terms of its outcomes, processes, or any other perspective that you think is important?
12. Please write any additional comments that you feel have not yet been covered, but that might be helpful in assessing the partnership.

See Appendix C for useful tools and information to help you secure local partners to help with your **We Can!** efforts.



## **We Can! Checklist: 4th P—Partnering**

- Review the list of current and past partners for possible involvement with **We Can!**
- Ask staff and current partners to suggest names of additional possible partners.
- Set dates for initial meetings and invite potential partners to attend.
- Hold initial meetings and determine the level of interest and possible involvement.
- At subsequent meetings, determine a definite level of support. Suggest conducting an assessment to determine areas of possible cooperation.
- Once assessment is completed, meet with potential partners to determine program or service opportunities and desired areas of involvement.
- Determine one or more specific partnering ventures. Agree on a partnership plan.
- Plan mutually acceptable methods of communication, networking, monitoring of progress, and conflict resolution.
- Be sure to regularly and publicly recognize and thank partners for their contributions.
- Periodically review the partnerships and elements that were successful and not so successful. Articulate lessons learned and ways to improve the partnership in the future. Plan additional partnerships.

## And Finally...

Remember that the goal of **We Can!** is to increase the number of children and adults who are able to maintain a healthy weight through improved nutrition and increased physical activity. Overweight and obesity are major health problems in the United States, and lifestyle changes that involve smart food choices, increased physical activity, and reduced screen/sedentary time are the most important steps toward prevention.

**We Can!** provides the tools to disseminate nutrition, physical activity, and reduced screen time messages to those who want to hear them and those who need to hear them. This program's ideas and suggestions are designed to be easy to carry out and fun to do. Use these tools and materials and share them with your colleagues.

Good luck and have fun!

