

North Carolina

Creating More Healthful Child Care Centers

Challenge

More than 62% of all adults in North Carolina are overweight or obese,* and more than 29% of high school students are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight.** Making positive changes in nutrition and physical activity behaviors among preschool-age children is a way to preempt the growth of this epidemic in the state.

Response

The Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care (NAP-SACC) was a pilot intervention in child care centers that aimed to improve nutrition and physical activity environments and practices through self-assessment and targeted technical assistance. The intervention, a crucial part of the North Carolina Healthy Weight Initiative and created in partnership with the Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, was implemented in six counties throughout the state, with two additional counties serving as controls. After completing a self-assessment, the child care center director, with assistance from a Child Care Health Consultant (CCHC), identified at least three areas for improvement.



Using a resource manual and continuing-education workshops developed by the NAP-SACC team, each center and its CCHC worked together over following six to nine months to improve and enhance that center's environment. Three 30-minute workshops were developed by NAP-SACC that covered childhood overweight, healthful eating, and physical activity. Then, both quantitative and qualitative evaluations were performed to gauge the effectiveness of the NAP-SACC intervention.

Results

After the centers assessed their nutrition and physical activity environments, technical assistance was provided on ways to make positive improvements, such as enhanced access to physical activity through purchase of additional equipment or creation of additional indoor/outdoor play space. With regard to nutrition, these improvements included activities such as increasing the availability of fruit and vegetables, reducing use of fried foods, reducing use of sugar-sweetened beverages, and introducing overall nutrition polices in individual centers.

The NAP-SACC pilot intervention aimed to improve nutrition and physical activity environments and practices in child care centers through self-assessment and targeted technical assistance.

The NAP-SACC workshops were attended by 122 staff members from centers in six counties. An evaluation of the pilot concluded that NAP-SACC helps child care centers improve their nutrition and physical activity environments and policies, as demonstrated through the NAP-SACC self-assessment data as well as an analysis of interview and focus group data. The evaluation also suggested that nutrition and physical activity interventions benefit from parental involvement and linguistic inclusiveness.

Based on progress made through NAP-SACC, there are plans to establish the intervention in child care centers throughout the state, conduct a large-scale evaluation of NAP-SACC to assess child-specific changes in behavior as a result of the project, and develop a similar project targeting infants.

What Else is North Carolina Doing to Address Overweight and Obesity?

--Trained more than 5,000 child care providers statewide to teach Color Me Healthy curriculum in the classroom. The program helps children ages 4–5 learn about physical activity and healthful eating with fun, interactive activities.

--Piloted *Eat Smart: North Carolina's Recommended Standards for All Foods Available in School* in all elementary schools in eight North Carolina school districts.

--Released *Move More: North Carolina's Recommended Standards for Physical Activity in School*.

--Developed a new curriculum, *Families Eating Smart and Moving More*, which offers families simple solutions for eating more meals at home, eating healthfully when eating out, moving more in their everyday routines, and watching less television.

--Released *Eating Smart and Moving More in African-American Churches: A Planning and Resource Guide*.

--Provided 1-year grants to 16 communities in 2005 (the sixth consecutive year the state has done so) to improve nutrition and physical activity behaviors by implementing strategies that promote policy and environmental changes.

For more information, e-mail Cathy Thomas, head of the Physical Activity and Nutrition Branch of the N.C. Division of Public Health (cathy.thomas@ncmail.net).

*CDC BRFSS, 2005

**CDC YRBSS, 2005