



Arizona

Yuma County's Steps Program

Improving nutrition and physical activity practices at child care centers

What is the public health problem?

Unhealthy eating habits and physical inactivity pose significant health problems for Yuma County children.

- In Arizona, among children aged 2–5 years who participate in the state's Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) supplemental nutrition program, the prevalence of those who are considered overweight or at risk of becoming overweight is close to 29%, according to the 2006* Pediatric Nutrition Surveillance System.
- In Yuma County, the problem persists as children get older—according to 2005* Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System data from Yuma County students in grades 9 through 12, nearly 36% are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight.

How Steps is responding

In 2005, realizing that children's unhealthy eating and physical activity habits tend to persist into adulthood, Yuma County's Steps Program began piloting the Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care (NAP SACC) program, which aims to improve nutrition and physical activity environments, policies, and practices in child care centers through self-assessment and targeted technical assistance.

- The Yuma County Public Health Services District (YCPHSD) marketed the program to the state agency that administers the county's Head Start program and to child care directors. In addition,

YCPHSD registered the NAP SACC program with the statewide child care and early education development system so that child care professionals could receive continuing education credits for participating in the program. Time and resources were also dedicated for the NAP SACC facilitator to be certified as a Child Care Health Consultant.

What is the impact?

- To date, the Steps Program has implemented the NAP SACC program in 21 child care centers in five communities, reaching more than 1,130 children.
- The centers now have developed written policies on physical activity and nutritional standards and trainings for staff members and parents.
- Nutritional changes at the participating childcare centers include the reduction of sugary beverages and an increase in whole-grain foods.

Why this program is working

According to *The Guide to Community Preventive Services*,[†] people will become more physically active if they are given health information along with access to new or improved places where they can be physically active. Also, evidence suggests that providing information and practical strategies related to good nutrition will lead to an increase in knowledge about healthy nutrition and an increase in healthy eating behaviors.[‡]

* Most recent data available

† <http://www.thecommunityguide.org>

‡ <http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/report/>