



National Heart, Lung, and Blood  
Institute

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### **NIH Designates Gary, Indiana, a *We Can!* City To Join Nationwide Fight Against Childhood Overweight**

GARY, INDIANA – The National Institutes of Health (NIH) will announce today that Gary, Indiana, will become one of the first *We Can!* cities in the nation. *We Can!* (Ways to Enhance Children’s Activity and Nutrition) is a national education program developed by the NIH, a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, to help prevent obesity and overweight in youth ages 8-13. As one of the first *We Can!* cities, Gary is tackling childhood obesity by implementing evidence-based programs to help families learn to adopt healthier lifestyle habits to maintain a healthy weight.

Karen Donato, S.M., obesity education initiative coordinator of the NIH's National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, will present Gary Mayor Rudy Clay with a specially designed road sign to highlight the city’s participation in *We Can!*

“Being overweight puts children's health and well-being at risk,” said Ms. Donato. “Gary is serving as a model city by showing how communities can be a vital part of the solution. We commend Mayor Clay and the city of Gary for their continuing commitment to guide parents and caregivers on the best ways to help their children maintain a healthy weight.”

“Gary is proud to be able to provide our parents and children with *We Can!* programs and information on how to maintain a healthy weight,” said Mayor Clay. “We are doing great things in Gary and our partnership with the NIH will aid in strengthening our ongoing commitment to make Gary overall, one of the healthiest cities in America.”

Childhood overweight is a growing national epidemic. The percentage of children and teens who are overweight has more than doubled in the past 30 years, and today one in three children ages 2-19 are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight. In 2005, Indiana was ranked as the 10<sup>th</sup> most obese state in the nation, and 15 percent of Indiana’s high school students are overweight (2005 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System and 2005 Indiana Youth Risk Behavior Survey). Like adults, overweight youth are at risk for health problems such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, heart disease, and asthma.

"The National Institutes of Health developed *We Can!* to bring to our communities research-based information and strategies to teach children how to adopt healthy lifestyle behaviors that can help them maintain a healthy weight," noted NIH Director Elias Zerhouni, M.D. "Through the efforts of communities like Gary, *we can* make a difference."

As part of the *We Can!* City Program, NIH will provide technical assistance on planning and implementing *We Can!*, as well as materials such as parent handbooks, posters, videos, and the one-stop resource "We Can! Energize Our Community: Toolkit for Action." As a *We Can!* city, Gary has agreed to offer obesity prevention programs to both parents and youth in collaboration with a variety of community-based partners. In addition, Gary will distribute *We Can!* tips and information on maintaining a healthy weight to all city employees.

Gary area residents have already begun embracing *We Can!* activities offered through the Gary Parks and Recreation Department. The organization is one of 14 *We Can!* Intensive Community Sites selected by the NIH to pilot the nationwide program beginning in June 2005. As a *We Can!* intensive community, the group has reached hundreds of youth and parents through community events and *We Can!* curricula provided in partnership with area businesses and organizations such as the Gary Youth Services Bureau and local health department, community fitness center, and academic institutions.

*We Can!* offers parents, health professionals, youth, and community groups evidence-based programs and activities to help children ages 8-13 maintain a healthy weight. The program targets parents and caregivers as the primary group for influencing youth and focuses on *three* important behaviors: *improved* food choices, *increased* physical activity and *reduced* recreational screen time. *We Can!* is a collaboration of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute with three other NIH institutes: the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases; the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development; and the National Cancer Institute.

For additional information on *We Can!*, visit <http://wecan.nhlbi.nih.gov> or call toll-free 1-866-35-WeCan.

**Media interviews will be available on May 1, 6:00 PM CT at the Gary City Hall, 401 Broadway, with Karen Donato; Mayor Clay; Dr. Richard Hood, Health Commissioner, City of Gary; LaTanya Williams, Gary Recreation and Parks Department; Rosie Thomas, Director, Minority Health Department; and Sheila George, Director, Multicultural Wellness Network.**

**Photo opportunity will be available when Mayor Clay receives a Gary *We Can!* City Road Sign from Ms. Donato designating Gary, Indiana, as a *We Can!* City.**

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*The National Institutes of Health (NIH) — The Nation's Medical Research Agency — includes 27 Institutes and Centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is the primary federal agency for conducting and supporting basic, clinical and translational medical research, and it investigates the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information about NIH and its programs, visit [www.nih.gov](http://www.nih.gov).*