



National Heart, Lung, and Blood
Institute

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

SOUTH BEND, INDIANA – The National Institutes of Health (NIH) will announce today that South Bend, 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, South Bend is tackling childhood obesity by implementing evidence-based programs to help families learn to adopt healthier lifestyle habits to maintain a healthy weight.

Kicking off a regional *We Can!* event at the South Bend Marriott, Karen Donato, S.M., obesity education initiative coordinator of the NIH’s National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, will unveil a specially designed road sign to highlight the city’s participation in *We Can!* Phil St. Clair, South Bend Park Superintendent, will accept the sign on behalf of the city.

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

“With tips and solutions on how to help children maintain a healthy weight through eating well and physical activity, we will create a healthier community,” said South Bend Mayor Stephen Luecke. “Through our partnership with the NIH through *We Can!*, we have what we need to continue my ongoing commitment to help parents learn strategies to prevent childhood obesity and reduce overweight problems.”

The two-day regional *We Can!* event will be attended by more than 150 community leaders from 16 states and the District of Columbia. The event will showcase South Bend’s local efforts and feature national experts on science-based curricula developed for youth and for parents to promote healthy lifestyles.

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 10th 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 South Bend, *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, South Bend has agreed to offer obesity prevention programs to both parents and youth in collaboration with a variety of community-based partners. In addition, South Bend will distribute *We Can!* tips and information on maintaining a healthy weight to all city employees.

South Bend area residents have already begun embracing *We Can!* activities offered through the South Bend 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 thousands of youth and parents through community events and *We Can!* curricula provided in partnership with area schools, hospitals, and businesses.

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 April 30, 11:00 AM ET at the South Bend Marriott with Karen Donato of NIH; Dr. Judy Monroe, Indiana State Health Commissioner; Phil St. Clair, South Bend Park Superintendent; and Paul McMinn, Assistant Director of Recreation, South Bend Parks and Recreation Department.

Photo opportunity will be available when Ms. Donato presents Mr. St. Clair a specially designed road sign, designating South Bend, 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.