Why Should State Legislators Be Concerned?

- **Obesity rates are climbing fast.** In 1990, no state reported obesity rates at or above 20 percent. By 2006, however, 46 states reported obesity rates above 20 percent. Of those, 22 states reported obesity rates of more than 25 percent. And, for the first time in the history of gathering state obesity statistics, two states reported that more than 30 percent of their adult populations are now obese.¹

- **Obesity is an economic drain.**
  - National estimates for health care and other costs related to obesity ranged from $98 billion to $124 billion in 2004.²
  - In the states, obesity-related care costs ranged from $87 million in Wyoming to $7.7 billion in California in 2003 dollars.³
  - Nearly 50 percent of obesity-related health care costs were paid by Medicaid and Medicare.
  - Obesity costs U.S. companies nearly $13 billion every year. These costs include health insurance costs, paid sick leave, life insurance and disability insurance.⁴

- **Obesity is linked to many chronic diseases.** Being obese is a risk factor for many chronic diseases and health conditions, including: type 2 diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol, heart disease, stroke, sleep apnea and some cancers.⁵

- **Obesity is preventable with regular physical activity and good nutrition.** Both components of a healthy lifestyle also help reduce the risk of chronic diseases, including heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure.⁶

What Disparities Are Associated with Obesity?

- **African-American and Hispanic adults have higher rates of obesity than whites.** The prevalence rates are 39 percent for African-Americans, 32 percent for Hispanics and 29 percent for whites.⁷

- **American Indian/Alaska Native adults are nearly two times as likely to be obese as white adults.⁸**

What Can State Legislators Do?

- **Support efforts to combat obesity among state employees.** Create or expand a state employee workplace health program. Work with agencies responsible for food service—including cafeterias and vending machines—to ensure that food served to employees meets guidelines for healthful food choices.

- **Support private sector workplace health programs.** Partner with business groups promoting workplace health. Consider tax incentives to spur employers to create workplace health programs.

- **Encourage the health care system to fight obesity.** Create health provider incentives for prevention services and counseling to encourage healthy behaviors within your state’s Medicaid program. Work with health care insurers and employers to extend coverage and employee incentives for preventive services including nutrition and obesity screening, counseling and treatment.
- Encourage local zoning and planning decisions aimed at increasing physical activity and improving access to healthful foods. Support funding for walking paths and biking trails. Encourage mixed-use zoning in urban areas to help create more “walkable neighborhoods.” Consider ways to help low-income people buy more fresh foods at reasonable prices by creating incentives for full-service grocery stores to locate in low-income neighborhoods.
- Promote awareness about obesity and how to prevent it. Support public awareness campaigns about how regular physical activity and proper nutrition can prevent obesity. Encourage the food industry and restaurants to offer smaller portion sizes and more complete nutritional information for consumers.

What is Obesity?

Obesity means having a very high amount of body fat in relation to lean body mass. A person with a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or higher is considered obese. BMI is calculated by dividing a person’s weight by the square of his or her height. For example, an adult who is 5 feet 9 inches tall and weighs 203 pounds has a BMI of 30.

For more information about this definition, visit http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/defining.htm

To find state-by-state obesity trends, go to:
- CDC’s U.S. Obesity Trends 1985-2006 Web page
  http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/trend/maps/index.htm
- To find state-by-state estimates of the costs of obesity, go to:
  CDC’s Overweight and Obesity: Economic Consequences Web page
  http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/economic_consequences.htm

For more information, see these Healthy States publications available at http://www.healthystates.csg.org/publications/:
- Adult Obesity Tool Kit
- Promoting Workplace Health Legislator Policy Brief

If you would like more information or references:
- Send your inquiry to http://healthystates.csg.org/ (keyword: questions/comments) or
- Call the CSG Health Policy Group at (859) 244-8000

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Sources:


