New Report Tracks State Legislation on Public Health

Childhood obesity, immunization, smoking bans among priorities in 2006

Amid a blizzard of other concerns—immigration, gas prices, same-sex marriage, minimum wage, abortion and eminent domain—state legislators also tackled a wide range of public health issues. According to a report on legislative activity during 2006, lawmakers were especially keen to curb rising childhood obesity rates and debated immunization policies and smoking bans.

New Public Health Legislation Report
Prepared for the Healthy States Initiative by the Health Policy Tracking Service, a service of Thomson West, the report tracked legislation in the states on a wide range of public health issues from Jan. 1 through July 3, when most state legislatures had completed the bulk of their legislative activity. The report is divided into chapters, each of which offers an analytic overview of legislative activity in one of 18 broadly defined categories of public health issues. Download the report from www.healthystates.csg.org.

Here is a sampling of state action in 2006 based on the report.

Childhood Obesity
At least 23 states considered legislation to establish or change school nutrition standards, and 34 states debated bills to enhance physical education requirements for school children.

On the school nutrition front, Connecticut enacted legislation (Senate Bill 373) to regulate the kind of beverages children in all grade-levels can buy at school or at school-related activities. The new law, widely considered one of the most stringent in nation, limits beverage sales to students to low- and non-fat milk, non-dairy milk and 100 percent fruit or vegetable drinks and water. Under the law, local boards of education can sell other beverages to students, but only after school hours or at school-related events on weekends.

In addition to the mandates, the legislation also encourages schools to offer healthier

What They Did on Their Summer Vacations
State legislators addressed public health issues

If state legislators had to write an essay when they returned to session this fall titled “What I did on my summer vacation,” many of them could include learning something new about public health at one of the three meetings conducted by The Council of State Governments.

The three meetings focused on public health issues facing states today. Legislators representing all 50 states—as well as policymakers from Puerto Rico, Guam and the Virgin Islands—participated in the meetings. Slides from the speakers’ presentations are available on the Healthy States Web site at www.healthystates.csg.org/Events+and+Conferences.

Here are highlights from the meetings.

Tennessee Gov. Phil Bredesen, center, talks to Dr. Laurie Whitsel, from left, of the American Heart Association, and Sen. Mattie Hunter of Illinois at the Policies to Promote Healthy Lifestyle: Childhood and Beyond forum in September. Bredesen unveiled a new series of investments in schools in his state called, “Project Diabetes.” A total of $6 million in grants will be used for a new public awareness campaign to encourage teens to eat better and to exercise.

Building Healthier Communities
During the first day of the Building Healthier Communities for Our Youth and Adults sum-
Texas state Sen. Leticia Van de Putte answers questions about how to be an effective champion on public health issues.

Texas had better immunization records for cattle than for children. In 1990, Texas state Sen. Leticia Van de Putte—a pharmacist and mother of six—skillfully used that telling fact to help explain to voters her motivation in seeking office for the first time.

She won that election, and went to serve five terms in the House and is now completing her fourth term in the Senate. In office, she has become a major champion of health care legislation. Among other health-related bills, she co-authored major legislation on children’s health insurance and bills aimed at preventing lead poisoning in children.

During all that time—during all the campaigns and all the floor debates—Van de Putte has understood the power of compelling facts and stories.

While continuing to represent her constituents in San Antonio, Van de Putte is now a widely recognized state legislative leader. Earlier this year, she became the first Hispanic to serve as President of the National Conference of State Legislatures. She is on the executive committee of The Council of State Governments. She was the immediate past president of the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators.

Questions and answers about public health issues from experts and state leaders

Q. You’re a practicing pharmacist. Can legislators who are not health professionals become effective champions for public health issues?
A. Certainly, by keeping abreast of the issues through meetings with health care professionals and involvement in health organizations.

Public health issues affect all of us regardless of (whether) you are a member of a health care profession or not. Each legislator is a member of a family. Whether as a spouse, parent, grandparent or sibling, we are all impacted by health care issues. Keeping this in mind, I like to remind my colleagues that the best way to keep abreast of public health issues is by meeting with health care professionals and getting involved in health organizations.

Q. Let’s say a colleague has identified a public health concern he wants the legislature to address. What’s the most important advice you give him about how to sell the issue?
A. Make it applicable and beneficial for all, not just a select few. “Putting a face” on the issue at hand is key.

When I decided to run for the legislature, I was concerned that Texas cattle had better immunization records than our children. Yes, cattle have been an important resource for Texas, however our children are too. As a pharmacist and mother of six, I felt that by “putting a face” on the issue of early childhood healthcare I could be instrumental in educating my colleagues on the importance of immunizations for children, the future of our great state.

Q. If you had to assign homework to fellow legislators interested in becoming effective public health advocates, what would you include in your assignment?
A. How to use the best “evidence” to make your case—know the why, what and cost, show how it is an investment in health.

To be an effective advocate in the legislature, utilizing best evidence practices is instrumental and key in making one’s case when advocating for legislation. If a freshman legislator were to ask me for advice on the legislative process, I would merely share that although the process may be daunting, if you know what the issue is and why a solution is needed, stakeholders will have the opportunity to share what best evidence is available to make your case.

—Interview conducted by Dan Lorentz, Healthy States Quarterly editor.
Special Section: **Public Health Resources for Legislators**

Where to Find Policy Ideas and Background Information:

A guide to selected organizations

This guide highlights some of the major organizations that provide policy ideas and background information about public health issues—many of which produce publications that are designed specifically for state legislators.

**The Healthy States Initiative Partners**

**Healthy States**  
[www.healthystates.csg.org](http://www.healthystates.csg.org)

The Healthy States Initiative is a partnership among The Council of State Governments, the National Black Caucus of State Legislators and the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators and is funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

This site offers numerous resources written specifically with state legislators in mind. You'll find extensive information on a variety of public health issues, tool kits for policymakers and issue briefs. There's also an archive of past Webcasts on subjects such as school wellness, reducing colorectal cancer and proven anti-smoking strategies for states.

For more information about publications from the Healthy States Initiative, see “New Healthy States Publications for State Legislators,” located in this pull-out section.

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

The CDC is the lead public health and safety agency of the federal government. CDC applies research and findings to help Americans live healthier and safer lives and responds to public health emergencies.

The CDC’s main Web site and affiliated Web sites contain an impressive collection of the latest data, reports, initiatives, action plans, state profiles, guidelines and recommendations available on hundreds of public health concerns. CDC’s Public Health Law Program at [www2.cdc.gov/phlp](http://www2.cdc.gov/phlp) includes resources on the relationship of public health law to emergency preparedness, chronic diseases, environmental health and immunizations, among other issues.

**National Black Caucus of State Legislators**  
[www.nbcsl.com](http://www.nbcsl.com)

NBCSL represents more than 600 legislators from 46 states representing more than 30 million voters.

At this Web site, you can get a list of members of the NBCSL’s Committee on Health & Human Services, chaired by North Carolina state Rep. Beverly Earle. The site also links to NBCSL resolutions on health-related issues, including eliminating racial and ethnic disparities in health care and improving health literacy.

**National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators**  
[www.nhcsl.com](http://www.nhcsl.com)

NHCSL is a catalyst for joint action on issues of common concern, such as health, education, immigration, homeownership and economic development to all segments of the Hispanic community.

The NHCSL Web site contains a health care policy section, which includes links to reports and other resources related to public health issues of interest to Hispanic state legislators.

**More Organizations**

**American Public Health Association**  
[www.apha.org](http://www.apha.org)

APHA represents more than 50,000 members from more than 50 public health occupations.

On this Web site, you can order a report addressing the cross-cultural and health care needs of American Indians and Alaska Natives. There’s a report on physical and emotional abuse of the elderly and extensive resources on pandemic flu preparedness. You’ll also find a database on community solutions to health disparities. You can read testimony on the federal public health budget for FY 2007 and view fact sheets on ensuring access to health care, universal coverage, and mental health care access. The site also offers links to numerous other public health topics, and includes links to all state public health associations.

**Association of State and Territorial Health Officials**  
[www.astho.org](http://www.astho.org)

ASTHO represents the chief health officials in the 50 states, U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia.

This Web site offers a primary care resource guide outlining state efforts to expand health insurance and a brochure on state investments in adolescent school health. You can read an overview of trends, experiences, and outcomes of summits on pandemic flu held this spring and there’s a brief on Health Disparities Collaboratives, a national program focused on decreasing health disparities through adoption of improvement processes by health centers.

Information on many other prevention topics is also available.

**National Association of County and City Health Officials**  
[www.naccho.org](http://www.naccho.org)

NACCHO is the national organization representing local health departments.

On this site, you can read a national profile of local health departments, see what health departments are doing to plan for pandemic flu, and keep up with national funding and policies for local health departments. NACCHO also offers policy statements on topics like injury prevention, immunization and environmental health.

**National Governors Association**  
[www.nga.org](http://www.nga.org)

NGA develops policy reports on innovative state programs and represents state officials on key federal issues. Through the NGA Center for Best Practices, the group highlights state innovations on issues like health, education, technology, welfare reform and the environment.

On the NGA’s Web site you can read issue briefs on how states are facilitating adoption of health information technology and approaches states can use. Also, get details about Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee’s Healthy America Initiative. There’s a site highlighting best practices by the states in cancer control and prevention and a report on preventing youth obesity through school-based efforts.

**National Association of Chronic Disease Directors**  
[www.chronicdisease.org](http://www.chronicdisease.org)

The goal of the NACDD is to link the chronic disease program directors of each state and territory and to provide a national forum for chronic disease prevention and control efforts.

At this Web site, you’ll find a collection of stories and reports about state programs that are effectively reducing the burden of chronic disease. You can also read reports on the prevention of diabetes, the role of state health departments in improving the health of older adults and community programs that promote healthy eating and physical activity. There are also links to collected resources from partners highlighting many chronic disease and public health issues.
National Conference of State Legislatures  
www.ncsl.org

NCSL provides research and technical assistance to the legislators and staffs of the 50 states.

The NCSL Web site offers a report on state efforts to help ensure children have opportunities for healthier diets and more exercise. The site contains an examination of how state legislatures can impact land use planning and zoning to help achieve healthy community design. Among many other topics, you'll find resources that examine state policy issues concerning cancer survivorship and preventing chronic diseases.

National Prevention Information Network  
www.cdcnpin.org

The CDC's National Prevention Information Network produces, collects and disseminates materials and information on HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases and tuberculosis to organizations and people working in those disease fields in international, national, state and local settings.

On this site, you'll find searchable databases containing descriptions of more than 19,000 national, state or city organizations that provide resources and services related to HIV/AIDS, STDs and TB. Services include case management, counseling and testing, prevention, education and outreach, health care, support services, housing assistance and legal counseling.

You can read reports on the current state of the AIDS epidemic and STD infection rates in the United States, with overviews of key issues, risk groups and statistics. The site also lists 11 elements of successful prevention programs. Another resource examines what types of risk reduction activities work best in specific settings, like the workplace or schools. There also is basic information available about STD and HIV/AIDS prevention, transmission and testing.

Partnership for Prevention  
http://prevent.org

The Partnership for Prevention is a national membership organization of corporations, nonprofits and state health departments.

On the Web site, you'll find a report summarizing evidence supporting eight health policy priorities for states. There's a guide for states and communities to develop and implement integrated chronic disease prevention programs. And you can read a study ranking the health impact and cost effectiveness of 25 preventive services.

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation  
www.rwjf.org/portfolios/resources/publications.jsp?iaid=138

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) is the nation's largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to improving the health and health care of all Americans. Its Web site contains links to RWJF-funded reports and studies that are of interest to state legislators. For example, you can download “Making Places for Healthy Kids,” which examines efforts to make changes to the built environment that create opportunities for children to be more physically active in their daily lives. Another downloadable report is: “State Actions to Promote Nutrition, Increase Physical Activity and Prevent Obesity: A Legislative Overview.” This quarterly report tracks state legislative actions on issues related to childhood obesity.

---Sean Stone is a health policy analyst with The Council of State Governments.

Where to Find Information on the Web:  
A guide to selected links by the issue

Many Web sites enable state legislators to find localized statistics and other information about a variety of public health concerns. On many of these sites, legislators can find information about disease rates in the communities they represent. Information about racial and ethnic health disparities in their states and communities also is often available. Sites that have state-specific and disparity data are marked.

Here's a list of links—many of them from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)—that can inform your policymaking decisions.

Birth Defects Prevention  
www.cdc.gov/ncbddd

This site from CDC's National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities offers information on a range of topics, including the benefits of folic acid, preventing fetal alcohol syndrome and how to promote healthy pregnancies.

http://healthyamericans.org/state/birthdefect

On this site from the Trust for America's Health, states are graded on efforts to track and prevent birth defects. Clicking on the state takes you to a report card assessing the programs available in each state. (State-specific data available)

Cancer Prevention  
www3.cancer.gov/atlasplus

The National Cancer Institute's Cancer Mortality Maps and Graphs Web site provides interactive maps, graphs and text showing geographic patterns and time trends of cancer death rates from 1950 to 1994 for more than 40 types of cancer. (State-specific data available)

http://statecancerprofiles.cancer.gov

This site allows you to generate a state cancer profile by selecting a state and one of 22 different types of cancer. (State-specific and disparity data available)

Chronic Disease Prevention  
www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/states

On this site from the CDC, you can select a state to access information on chronic disease, including statistics, reports, and comparisons of state-based programs and projects. (State-specific data available)

Diabetes  

State-specific estimates of diagnosed diabetes are available here.

Disabilities and Wellness  
www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/dhichartbook

This CDC site features profiles of health for adults with disabilities in the 50 states. (State-specific and disparity data available)

Emergency Public Health Preparedness  
www.bt.cdc.gov

On this CDC site devoted to emergency preparedness and response, you'll find a wealth of helpful information about preparing for and responding to bioterrorism, natural disasters, pandemic flu and other related issues.
Healthy States Quarterly Fall 2006

www.astho.org/?template=preparedness.html

The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) highlights promising state-based public health preparedness efforts on this site. You can download ASTHO’s “States of Preparedness: Health Agency Progress 2006” from the site. (State-specific data available)

http://healthyamericans.org/reports/bioterror05

The Trust for America’s Health has its third annual study of preparedness for major health emergencies available here. You can access state-specific information and scores that evaluate 12 different aspects of health emergency preparedness. (State-specific data available)

www.naccho.org/topics/emergency/index.cfm

At this site, the National Association of County and City Health Officials offers a wide range of resources related to improving state and local public health preparedness. (State-specific data available)

Environmental Public Health

www.cdc.gov/asthma/brfss/default.htm#04

On this site, the CDC allows you to examine state-by-state charts on the prevalence of asthma from 1999 to 2004. (State-specific and disparity data available)

Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention

www.cdc.gov/DHDP/state_program/index.htm

The CDC has state-by-state statistics on heart disease and stroke available here. (State-specific data available)

HIV and AIDS

www.cdc.gov/nchstp/od/nchstp.html

From the CDC’s National Center for HIV, STD and TB Prevention’s site, you can link to a wide variety of information related to HIV/AIDS, other sexually transmitted diseases, tuberculosis and viral hepatitis.

www.cdcnpin.org/scripts/hiv/surv.asp

The CDC’s National Prevention Information Network offers this page of links to HIV/AIDS reports for the United States, which include state specific information. (State-specific and disparity data available)


This CDC site contains tables detailing the number of people living with HIV/AIDS or AIDS by geographic area as of December 2004. (State-specific and disparity data available)

www.statehealthfacts.org

This Kaiser Family Foundation site provides access to maps and statistical data on AIDS cases in the United States. (State-specific and disparity data available)

Immunizations

www.immunize.org/laws

This site from the Immunization Action Coalition examines state mandates on immunization and vaccine-preventable diseases. (State-specific data available)

www.cdc.gov/nip/coverage/NIS/05/tab02_antigen_iap.xls

Here’s a table from the CDC detailing estimated vaccination coverage levels for selected vaccines in each state. (State-specific data available)

Influenza

www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/fluactivity.htm

The CDC posts weekly flu activity reports from mid-October through mid-May, which includes detailed maps that show the levels of flu activity across states and the country. (State-specific data available)

Injury Prevention

www.ihs.org/laws/state_laws/grad_license.html

This chart on the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety site rates the states on young driver licensing laws and other highway safety laws. (State-specific data available)

www.cdc.gov/ncipc/maps/default.htm

Here’s a site that allows you to create state maps to show the injury mortality rate for nine causes of death. You also can read state injury profiles for every state from 2001. (State-specific data available)

Obesity

www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/trend/index.htm

On this CDC site, you’ll find a downloadable slideshow about obesity trends in the United States, and links to data on obesity rates among children and adults in every state through 2005. (State-specific data available)

www.rwjf.org/files/publications/alan_report.pdf?gsa=1

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation site offers this link to a February 2005 report on community efforts to build environments that encourage children to be more physically active.

http://healthyamericans.org/reports/obesity2006

“F as in Fat” is an annual report on obesity from the Trust for America’s Health. Here you’ll find an interactive map with obesity statistics for every state and information on obesity-related legislative actions by states. (State-specific data available)

www.fns.usda.gov/ano/SNAP/SNAPMap.htm

This Agriculture Department site includes an interactive map with statistics on state nutrition action plans. (State-specific data available)

Oral Health

www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/index.htm

The CDC offers state specific oral health data here including state maps showing fluoride content in the water; statistics on tooth decay and a breakdown of state oral health programs. (State-specific data available)

Reproductive Health

www.cdc.gov/PRAMS/states.htm

At this Web site, you can click on a state to read state-specific, population-based data on maternal attitudes and experiences before, during, and shortly after pregnancy. The PRAMS data allows CDC and the states to monitor changes in maternal and child health indicators, such as the quality and availability of prenatal care. (State-specific and disparity data available)

School Health

www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/index.htm

On this site, the CDC’s Division of Adolescent and School Health offers a range of resources on many youth-related issues, including asthma, childhood overweight, crises preparedness and response, injury and violence, physical activity and sexual risk behaviors. (State-specific data available)

www.nasbe.org/HealthySchools/States/State_Policy.asp

The National Association of State Boards of Education offers this site, which looks at state level school health policies. There’s an interactive map which links to a page of data on each state. (State-specific data available)

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

www.cdcnpin.org/scripts/std/surv.asp

Here you’ll find surveillance reports from the CDC on sexually transmitted diseases. (State-specific and disparity data available)
Here you can access annual surveillance and statistics reports on sexually transmitted diseases for 1999-2004. There are also state-by-state profiles that break down the statistics for syphilis, Chlamydia and gonorrhea. (State-specific and disparity data available)

www.cdc.gov/nchstp/dstd/Stats_Trends/Stats_and_Trends.htm

Trends and Solutions in Public Health Tool Kit

Trends and Solutions in Public Health Tool Kit

Developed by the CDC, the State Tobacco Activities Tracking and Evaluation (STATE) System is an electronic data warehouse that contains up-to-date historical state-level data on tobacco use and prevention. (State-specific data available)

http://slati.lungusa.org

This American Lung Association site includes a report on state legislated actions on tobacco issues. (State-specific data available)

http://lungaction.org/reports/tobacco-control05.html

Here’s a state-by-state report on tobacco control laws. (State-specific data available)

Multiple Issues

www.cdc.gov/brfss

The CDC’s Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is an ongoing telephone health survey system, tracking health conditions and risk behaviors in the United States yearly. BRFSS provides state-specific information about issues such as asthma, diabetes, health care access, alcohol use, hypertension, obesity, cancer screening, nutrition and physical activity, tobacco use, and more. (State-specific and disparity data available)

www.cdc.gov/mmwr/mmwr_wk.html

The CDC’s Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report contains data on specific diseases as reported by state and territorial health departments and reports on infectious and chronic diseases, environmental hazards, natural or human-generated disasters, occupational diseases and injuries, and intentional and unintentional injuries. (State-specific and disparity data available)


This site from the Health and Human Services Department’s Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality has 2005 state snapshots measuring health care quality based on numerous criteria. There are maps, graphs, rankings and data tables for each state. (State-specific data available)

—Sean Slone is a health policy analyst with The Council of State Governments.

For more information about Healthy States meetings, Web conferences and publications, visit www.healthystates.csg.org.

New Healthy States Publications for State Legislators

State legislators and policymakers can receive printed versions of these resources by calling The Council of State Governments at (859) 244-8000, or by e-mailing panderson@csg.org.

Preventing HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Diseases Tool Kit

An estimated 1 million Americans are infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are also on the rise in the U.S., affecting young people ages 15 to 24 at a rate of 19 million new infections every year. For both HIV/AIDS and STDs, minority communities are being hardest hit with new infections. The tool kit highlights what state legislators can do to prevent and control the spread of HIV/AIDS and STDs through legislation and regulation. Also find out how states are monitoring infection rates and how legislators are providing leadership on a local level to create public awareness and support prevention efforts. Download a print version at www.healthystates.csg.org/Public+Health+Issues/HIV+and+AIDS.

Graduated Driver Licensing Tool Kit

Numerous states have enacted graduated driver licensing, or GDL, systems to significantly reduce the crash rates of 16- and 17-year-old drivers. Find out what is included in a model GDL law and learn about other legislation states have successfully passed, including primary safety belt and zero-tolerance laws. This tool kit also features what legislators can do to improve GDL systems in their state. Download a print version at www.healthystates.csg.org/Public+Health+Issues/Injury+Prevention.

Trends and Solutions in Public Health Tool Kit

CSG and its partners NBCSL and NHCSL hosted nine Web conferences in 2005 on state public health issues and offered examples of promising solutions. The Web conferences offered advice from state legislators on addressing the issues and valuable information from health experts on state responses. Topics included:

1. Successful smoking cessation,
2. Diabetes prevention in Hispanic communities,
3. Preventing youth sexual risk behaviors,
4. Safety of childhood vaccines,
5. Preventive oral health,
6. Coordinated school health programs,
7. Disparities in elderly adult immunizations,
8. Colorectal cancer prevention in African-American communities, and

A CD-ROM with all nine Web conferences and issue briefs on each topic are included in the tool kit. Archived Web conferences also can be viewed on the Healthy States Web site at www.healthystates.csg.org/Events+and+Conferences/Web+Conferences.

State Official’s Guide to Wellness

Providing state policymakers with a snapshot of the state of chronic diseases in America, the guide describes what the disease trend-lines mean for state budgets and gives a framework for understanding the major policy issues surrounding wellness programs. How states and employers have begun to use wellness initiatives to promote healthy behaviors is presented for more than 12 states. Download a print version at www.healthystates.csg.org/Publications.

TrendsAlert: Costs of Chronic Disease: What Are States Facing?

Startling trends in health care costs, chronic disease rates and Medicaid costs for chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, obesity, heart disease and cancer are examined in this TrendsAlert. It also includes state policies and solutions to prevent chronic diseases and control related costs. Download a print version at www.healthystates.csg.org/Publications.

TrendsAlert: Targeting Low Immunization Rates in Adolescents

This Trends Alert provides information on the challenges states face in improving vaccination coverage rates in adolescents and how successful policies and strategies that have improved childhood immunization rates can be used to reach this population. It also provides information on the new vaccine recommend for adolescents to prevent cervical cancer; human papillomavirus (HPV), and the issues states will face in implementing these recommendations. Download a print version at www.healthystates.csg.org/Publications.
foods in school lunch programs. The new law gives schools extra money for every meal served that meets the new, higher nutrition standards.

In other action on school nutrition, Vermont (House Bill 456) and Oklahoma (House Bill 2655) passed legislation to make it easier for children to get fresh fruits and vegetables in schools by creating farm-to-school programs. Colorado (SB 127) launched a pilot program to offer free fruits and vegetables to students in selected schools during the school day.

The other key strategy to curb childhood obesity is encouraging more physical activity at school. West Virginia (Senate Bill 785), Tennessee (House Bill 3750) and Florida (House Bill 7087) all enacted legislation to enhance health and physical education requirements in school.

Immunization

Forty-one states considered a range of legislation dealing with immunization issues, including access to vaccines. Examples of enacted legislation include new laws in New York (Assembly Bill 11236) and Ohio (House Bill 257) to improve access to vaccines for seniors.

Wyoming (House Bill 36) focused on providing funding for vaccines for children. The new law gives the health department authority to implement a program to provide vaccines to all children of state residents who aren’t eligible for vaccines under existing federal guidelines.

Public Place Smoking Bans

In the first six months of 2006, at least 15 states debated legislation aimed at implementing statewide bans on smoking in public places, and a total of 33 states considered a variety of measures to discourage or restrict smoking. Four states enacted bills.

Colorado enacted the “Colorado Clean Indoor Air Act” (House Bill 1175). The law bans smoking in all indoor places, with a few exemptions noted, including parts of casinos, retail tobacco businesses, cigar bars and small businesses that aren’t open to the public.

Arkansas (Senate Bill 19), New Jersey (Senate Bill 1926), Louisiana (Senate Bill 742) and Washington, D.C. (L.B. 16-293) also enacted smoke-free public place legislation.

Other Issues

State legislators took action on many other public health issues as well. Here are a few examples:

* **Workplace wellness:** At least 14 states introduced legislation aimed at enhancing physical wellness at places of employment. Oklahoma (House Bill 2149) repealed a sunset provision on the Oklahoma Wellness Council—allowing the council to continue it works to improve workplace wellness efforts statewide.

* **Health disparities:** Maryland enacted four bills dealing with health disparities, including one (House Bill 1455), which created a pilot program for cultural competency training for health care providers. North Carolina (Senate Bill 1741) aims at reducing health disparities with a community-focused initiative.

* **Emergency preparedness:** Six bills expanding the authority of state and local agencies during emergencies or dealing with the qualifications of health care professionals in emergency situations—were enacted, including: Alabama (House Bill 107 and House Bill 1238), Louisiana (House Bill 61), Maine (Senate Bill 782) and Utah (Senate Bill 146).

* **Oral health:** New Mexico (House Bill 2) boosted Medicaid payments for dental services and Arizona (HB 2214) now gives dental hygienists’ greater independence to screen patients and to apply topical fluoride without entering into an affiliated practice relationship with a dentist.

* **HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C:** Massachusetts (HB 4176) enacted legislation requiring that a public health message about the safe use of hypodermic syringes and needles accompany the sale of the products. The intent is to prevent the contraction or spread of blood-borne diseases like AIDS and Hepatitis C.

* **Cancer screening:** Forty-five bills relating to cancer screening and prevention were introduced in the states. For example, Washington (Senate Bill 5714) enacted legislation to establish an early detection program for breast and cervical cancer for low- to moderate-income women aged 40-64.

* **Environmental health:** New Hampshire passed a law (House Bill 1673) that sets a goal to reduce mercury emissions from coal-burning power plants in the state by 80 percent by 2013 and requires the installation of scrubber technology.

* **Diabetes:** Tennessee enacted Senate Bill 3895 to create a new diabetes prevention agency within the state aimed at combating the spread of type 2 diabetes.

* **Heart disease:** Maryland (House Bill 58), Massachusetts (HB 4850) and Washington (Senate Bill 6197) all enacted legislation that recognizes heart disease as a condition that may impact ethnic and racial minorities at disproportionate rates and directs state officials to collect and publish statistics about who gets the disease.

* **Preventing birth defects:** California enacted House Bill 405, which bans pesticide use on school grounds pending a study of the pesticide’s possible role in causing birth defects.

* **Graduated driver licensing:** Three states enacted laws increasing training hours under their driver’s licensing programs: Delaware (House Bill 256), Illinois (House Bill 4768) and Missouri (Senate Bill 1001)

* **Hospital acquired infections:** Several states considered legislation to require that hospitals collect information about infections acquired by patients during their hospital stays. The bill that Colorado enacted (House Bill 1045) is one example.

—Dan Lorentz is editor of the Healthy States Quarterly.
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mit, which took place in San Francisco in July, legislators learned about some of the issues threatening the health of the country’s youth, including obesity, poor oral health, smoking and nutrition.

Victor Colman, senior policy adviser at the Washington State Department of Health, urged legislators cooperate with state and local policymakers on prevention programs. He cautioned that legislation aimed at prevention takes a long time to show results, which is difficult for policymakers, who need to show results quickly.

Legislators also discussed a range of prevention policies aimed at adults, including those aimed at reducing heart disease and stroke, diabetes and obesity. Closing speaker Dr. Ann Albright, of the California Diabetes Prevention and Control Program, said legislators need to move from being good leaders to great leaders.

Science into Policy

Former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Joycelyn Elders urged legislators at the Transforming Science into Policy for a Healthier Nation forum to tackle the public health issues facing Americans with policies that have been proved effective by scientific research. This forum took place in Boston during August.

Legislators explored health disparities among adolescents, graduated driver licensing policies and policies to fight the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, such as expedited partner therapy. They also learned about adult flu vaccines, early detection programs for autism and other developmental disabilities, and the links between the environment and public health.

Dr. Howard Frumkin, director of CDC’s National Center for Environmental Health/Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, described how communities across the country often have features that limit the physical activity of residents. Legislators can help their constituents live more active lives, Frumkin said, through zoning laws, revitalizing downtowns and getting entire communities involved in redevelopment that makes a city more walkable.

Promoting Healthy Lifestyles

In September state legislators came together in Memphis, Tenn., at the Policies to Promote Healthy Lifestyles: Childhood and Beyond forum to learn about innovative approaches to help children eat more healthfully and get more exercise at school and at home.

Legislators reviewed policy examples from a variety of states. During her keynote address, Dr. Laurie Whitson, a research policy analyst at the American Heart Association, highlighted the massive growth of obesity in the country and the toll it is taking on youth. According to Whitson, Americans consume 815 billion calories every day--200 billion more than are needed.

Tennessee Gov. Phil Bredesen unveiled a new series of investment in schools called “Project Diabetes” at the meeting. He announced that $6 million in grants will be used for a new public awareness campaign encouraging teens to eat better and to exercise.

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