

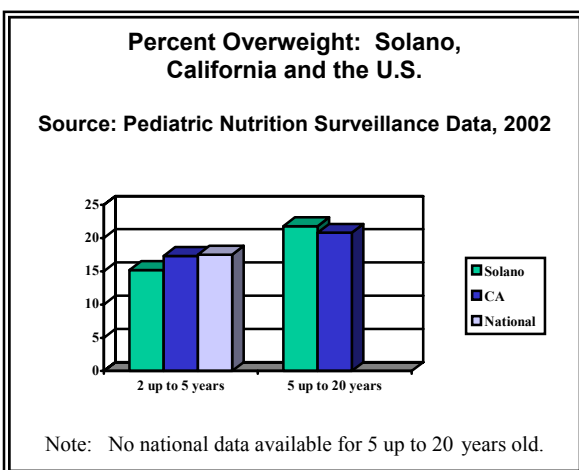
CHILDREN AND WEIGHT: TAKING ACTION IN SOLANO COUNTY



A Strategic Plan to Improve Our Children's Health *Executive Summary*

Childhood overweight and physical inactivity have reached epidemic levels in the nation and in California, including Solano County. As a result, our children are having serious health problems now and more problems are predicted for the future. This epidemic is creating expensive and preventable long-term costs to both their quality of life and our economy. **Medical care costs associated with obesity are greater than those for both smoking and problem drinking combined.** In California, the 2001 weight-related health costs for both adults and children was estimated at \$14.2 billion a year. Preventing and treating childhood overweight is among the most important of the new health challenges that we face. This Strategic Plan provides action steps that can be taken to address childhood overweight in Solano County.

Background: Nationally, one in five children are overweight or at risk for being overweight with the number of overweight children nearly doubling over the past two decades. American teenagers have higher rates of obesity than those in 14 other industrial countries. Solano County has a higher rate of overweight children and youth, ages 5 up to 20 years old, than California. Over 31 percent of children 2 up to 5 years old are overweight or at risk of being overweight. For children and youth, ages 5 up to 20 years old, this increases to over 38 percent who are either overweight or at risk of being overweight. Fifty percent of overweight children and teens will remain overweight as adults.



Children today may be the first generation in America that have shorter life expectancies than their parents if the trend of childhood overweight and physical inactivity continue. Significant research indicates that excess weight and physical inactivity put our children at risk for chronic diseases, such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, some cancers, asthma, reproductive problems, and joint problems. **A child born in 2000 has a one in three chance of developing type 2 diabetes, with the risk being higher for Mexican American and African American children.** Overweight and obesity are closely linked to type 2 diabetes.

The basic cause of overweight is an imbalance between caloric intake and energy expenditure – too many calories, not enough physical activity, or both. Childhood overweight and physical inactivity are influenced by various individual, genetic, social, and environmental factors. Some factors we cannot

change, however, there are other factors that we can change. We now live in an environment of convenience, laborsaving devices, and readily available foods with high caloric density – an environment conducive to the genetic expression of obesity.

The Children and Weight Coalition of Solano County (CWCS) is a dynamic organization of over 75 agencies and individuals who are working to develop and implement effective solutions to address this growing epidemic of childhood overweight. With a grant from The California Endowment, CWCS conducted eight community forums, involving over 420 individuals, to gather information useful in developing a countywide strategic plan. Forums were held in Benicia, Dixon, Fairfield/Suisun/Travis, Rio Vista, Vacaville, and Vallejo. Forums were also conducted for schools and medical/health care providers. As a result of the CWCS planning process, action plans were developed for each community and then consolidated into a countywide strategic plan. Four strategic directions were identified as having the greatest impact on children and their environment: Home and Family Environment, School Environment, Community Environment, and Health Care Systems.

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STRATEGIC PLAN FOR SOLANO COUNTY



Strategic Direction: Home and Family Environment

Parents and family have a tremendous impact in determining a child's behavior toward their food choices and daily physical activity. Actions identified to assist families in providing a healthy and active environment for their children are:

- Encourage parents and caregivers to increase time for active play with their children and to set limits on television watching and screen time.
- Provide classes to educate parents, children, and teens about healthy food choices and ways to prepare simple, quick healthy meals and snacks that limit sugar and fat and increase dietary fiber.
- Establish affordable physical activity programs for families that can be used at home or in the community.
- Educate parents and promote ways they can be positive role models for their children by making healthy food choices and by maintaining a physically active lifestyle.
- Provide information and classes to parents and teens on planning healthy meals and the benefits of eating meals together as a family.
- Provide parents and caregivers with fun, effective ways to increase active play with their children.



Strategic Direction: School Environment

Schools are a key setting to help address childhood overweight since children spend a large portion of their time at school. Actions identified for schools to foster a healthier, more active environment for children are:

- Increase the awareness of school board members, administrators, principals, and other leaders on the importance of physical activity and healthy food choices for students.

- Provide multi-level physical education activities and programs in schools, including activities and programs for disabled children.
- Increase nutrition education in the curriculum for all children in grades K–12, as well as education for teachers and parents.
- Allow sufficient time for students to eat and enjoy lunch and have adequate time for active play during the lunch period.
- Provide parents with information and classes on the importance of physical activity and healthy food choices for their children and ways to accomplish it.
- Work with high school leadership classes and encourage students to do community service activities that increase physical activities with younger children, such as walking younger children to and from school.
- Provide school staff with training on the importance of modeling good nutrition and physical activity behaviors.



Strategic Direction: Community Environment

It really does take a village to raise healthy children. The community environment is critical in providing children and their families with the support and infrastructure for living a healthy lifestyle, including the availability of healthy food choices and opportunities for safe, active play. Actions identified for communities are:

- Increase the availability of low-cost programs that promote non-competitive physical activities for children and teens.
- Increase neighborhood safety to encourage children to walk to school, go biking and play outside.
- Create community environments that provide for safe physical activity for children and adults, such as safe sidewalks, parks, and recreational areas.
- Increase networking and bilingual communications about community opportunities to non-English speaking families.
- Increase access to healthy food choices in low-income neighborhoods by encouraging supermarkets and farmers markets in these areas.
- Establish a community Healthy Living Festival that promotes healthy food choices, physical activity, and a healthy lifestyle.
- Educate restaurants, including fast food and ethnic restaurants, about nutrition, using healthy cooking techniques, and providing healthy food options.
- Increase parent education programs on healthy eating and physical activity for their families.
- Expand the Summer School Lunch Program

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Strategic Direction: Health Care Systems

Health care providers have the unique opportunity to advise children on being active and making healthy food choices, identify children who are overweight or at risk of being overweight, and motivate families at risk to make lifestyle changes. Actions identified for the health care system to provide effective evaluation and management of children who are overweight or at risk of being overweight are:

- Increase the intervention and prevention of obesity into adulthood by training and motivating medical providers to use the Body Mass Index (BMI) for children.
- Create clinical pathways that provide increased follow-up referrals to Registered Dietitians and health education programs, such as family meal planning, physical activity, healthy eating and healthy food choices.
- Provide more clinic-based organized programs, such as Shape-down, within the medical facility.
- Provide health education tools with positive messages within a clinical setting.
- Develop effective ways to bring families together to manage a child's weight issue.
- Provide classes for parents on healthy eating and physical activity for their children.
- Encourage parents to take their children to routine well-child exams and inform them of available resources for their family.
- Educate health professionals on the importance of promoting breastfeeding to mothers and their families and how to support breastfeeding mothers.

CALL TO ACTION



The time for action is now! **It is quite likely that children and adults will continue to become more overweight unless we make a concerted effort to create an environment that promotes a healthy lifestyle.** Our children and youth are our future. They need to live in healthy and nurturing environments that promote and value physical activity and healthy food choices. Addressing childhood overweight will require action in many areas, as outlined in this strategic plan. The home, family, school, and community environments and the health care system are the strategic directions on which to focus in reducing the number of overweight children in Solano County. Working together, we can take the steps needed so that our children and youth will be able to achieve their full potential, have a longer life expectancy, and be productive, healthy citizens in the future.

"Children have never been very good at listening to their elders but they never fail to imitate them."
 -James Baldwin

For a copy of the full report: *Children and Weight: Taking Action in Solano County - A Strategic Plan to Improve Our Children's Health* and more information on childhood overweight or the Children and Weight Coalition of Solano County, go to our website at www.cwcsc.com.

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