

# Let's Move! in Indian Country

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## A Call to Action for Indian Country

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Over the past three decades, childhood obesity rates in America have tripled. Today, nearly one in three children in our nation is obese or overweight. This issue is even more severe in Indian Country as a study of four-year-olds found that obesity is two times more common among American Indian/ Alaska Native children than any other racial or ethnic group studied.

One-third of all children born in 2000 or later will suffer from diabetes at some point in their lives. Many others will face chronic obesity-related health problems like heart disease, high blood pressure, cancer and asthma. In 2002, more than 100,000 American Indians and Alaska Native adults, or nearly 15% of those receiving care from the Indian Health Service (IHS), were estimated to have diabetes.

### Become a *Let's Move!* in Indian Country Community

Like the First Lady's *Let's Move Cities and Towns* initiative, which is designed to encourage mayors and elected officials to adopt a long-term, sustainable and holistic approach to fighting childhood obesity, we are asking Tribal leaders, community leaders and Urban Indian centers that serve Native youth to adopt similar commitments to help fight childhood obesity among American Indian/ Alaska Native children. Many Tribal governments, officials, organizations and individuals are already taking action to fight childhood obesity and improve health in their communities. *Let's Move! in Indian Country* can support and amplify this work through our combined efforts. This initiative recognizes that every Tribal Nation and community is different, and every place will require a distinct approach to the issue.

#### Steps for Commitments

Tribal leaders, elected officials, Urban Indian Center coordinators and organizations across Indian Country can commit their Tribe, or organization to become a part of *Let's Move! in Indian Country*. All you have to do is choose at least one significant action to take during a 12-month period in each of the four pillar areas:

1. **Creating a Healthy Start on Life-** Reducing the risk of obesity in early childhood by helping families make healthy choices
2. **Developing Healthy Schools-** Providing healthy learning communities for Native Students.
3. **Increasing physical activity –** Creating capacity for physical education, sports and outdoor recreation programs.
4. **Increasing Access to Affordable, Healthy Foods-** Support the establishment of a food policy council

#### Requirements

To join, tribes and organizations can submit commitments to [letsmoveinindiancountry@doj.gov](mailto:letsmoveinindiancountry@doj.gov), describing the plan, timeline, and actions being taken to create healthier communities. Visit [www.letsmove.gov/indiancountry](http://www.letsmove.gov/indiancountry) for helpful tips and our toolkit.

#### Recognition of Participation

Tribes, organizations, and Urban Indian centers can be recognized in the following ways:

- Receive a certificate of acknowledgement confirming status as a part of the *Let's Move! in Indian Country* initiative
- *Let's Move! in Indian Country* representatives will seek out tribes, organizations and Urban Indian centers with successful initiatives to highlight and celebrate.
- Accomplishments and ideas for future action may be highlighted on the *Let's Move!* and *Let's Move! In Indian Country* websites.
- Tribal and organizational leaders will be invited to participate in conference calls with White House and federal agency staff to share best practices, discuss barriers and update on progress.
- Tribal and organizational leaders may be invited to attend events to celebrate collective success in combating childhood obesity.

Tribes and organizations taking significant steps in their communities to fight childhood obesity may receive special visits from professional athletes, celebrities, President's Council members and administration officials. *Let's Move! in Indian Country* seeks your ideas, input, and feedback on efforts that are really working and those that are not.

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## Help Families Make Healthy Choices

Tribal leaders, organizations and Urban Indian centers can help American Indian/Alaska Native families make healthier choices. Families play a key role in making healthy choices and shaping lifelong healthy habits. Kids learn about healthy eating from their family and from what is served at home and in their community. Families and community members can model healthy decisions about physical activity and nutrition but in today's busy world, this isn't always easy. Families need a community of support.

One of the most important roles that your community can take in Creating a Healthy Start on Life for Children is to support breastfeeding mothers. Breastfeeding is the traditional way to support the growth and development of an infant. Breastfeeding has been shown to have a profound impact in preventing many common early childhood illnesses including obesity and diabetes. Mothers who breastfeed have a lower risk of diabetes and certain cancers. The health benefits of breastfeeding are highly supported by research and The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Support Breastfeeding.

There are many ways to support breastfeeding mothers. One to encourage prenatal women to breastfeed is by educating them on the health benefits of breastfeeding. Providing safe and secure areas where mothers can breastfeed and peer support groups are examples of things your community can do. It is important for local leaders to engage health care professionals in this process, ensuring that proper support is given to children during their early childhood development.

Here are some ways Indian Country can enact changes that give American Indian/ Alaska Native families the tools they need to make healthy choices:

- Encourage hospitals in your community to become Baby-Friendly Hospitals.
  - Support new breastfeeding mothers in your communities and workplace.
  - Collaborate with your local WIC programs for a breastfeeding support in your community.
  - Promote local community organizations that provide access to healthy childhood activities.
  - Work with your local Head Start to identify strategies to promote breastfeeding and good nutrition.
  - Link your tribal or organizational website to *Let's Move!* with information for parents and families on healthy living, <http://www.letsmove.gov/parents.php>.
  - Work with local childcare providers and after-school programs to implement evidence-based standards for nutrition, physical activity and screen time within childcare settings.
  - Improve food choices for children in public venues.
  - Work with schools to ensure access to physical activity programs at a young age.
  - Form a tribal coalition tasked with identifying local barriers to healthy living.
  - Host cooking demonstration and nutrition education sessions with families to learn more about eating healthy. The demonstrations can showcase how to access Native American recipes using USDA Commodities in the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR).
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## Improve the Health of Learning Communities

The majority of young people's caloric intake happens before, during, and after the formal school day as part of school meal programs. *Let's Move! in Indian Country* has set a goal of transforming the learning environments of 100 institutions that serve and educate Native youth, including BIE schools U.S. public schools and other learning communities, by 2012. Increased access to Food and Nutrition Service programs will help schools offer school breakfast, school lunch, after-school snacks, and fresh fruit and vegetable snacks throughout the school day. While only 7% of Native American students attend BIE funded or BIE run schools, we can effectively reach the other 93% by better targeting our HealthierUS Schools outreach efforts to school districts with high Native populations. Additional outreach can be done to include culturally appropriate resources including those that promote traditional foods, school/ community garden initiatives and social/emotional health grants. With more than 31 million children nation-wide and 45,000 in our BIE schools participating in the National School Lunch Program and more than 11 million nation-wide participating in the National School Breakfast Program, good nutrition at school is more important than ever.

Tribal leaders and school officials can assist schools and afterschool programs in providing improved nutritional meals through some basic steps.

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- Encourage schools to join Team Nutrition (TN) and focus on the important role nutritious meals, nutrition education, and healthy school environments play in student lives. Becoming a Team Nutrition school is the first step towards meeting the HealthierUS School Challenge.
- Identify strategies to support local schools in the HealthierUS School Challenge (HUSSC). Tribal health educators and nutrition coordinators can assist schools in meeting the challenge goals.
- Encourage schools with eligible afterschool programs to provide meals through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).
- Encourage all schools to expand their School Breakfast Program (SBP) by reviewing alternate service methods such as: breakfast in the classroom, grab n' go, and breakfast carts to increase participation.
- Support the development of a summer meals program by becoming a sponsor and/or site through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). A Tribal Government and/or Council can be a Sponsor, too!
- Promote the expansion or improvement of nutrition education in schools.
- Work to ensure that school cafeterias are designed to encourage children to choose healthier snacks and meals, including a free or reduced price lunch or breakfast.
- Promote school and community gardens that incorporate traditional foods and techniques.
- Promote farm-to-school programs and the incorporation of fresh food into school meals.
- Assist local schools in applying for the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP). Schools can also promote nutrition education in the classroom through creative partnerships with nutrition coordinators.
- Support upgrades or exchanges of school cafeteria equipment. For example, swap out a deep fryer for a salad bar.
- Connect with Farm to School: Utilize the National Farm to School Network which helps to develop community-based food systems that can enhance local Tribal producers by assisting them in accessing the local food procurement system.
- Encourage families to enroll their children in school meal programs such as the National School Lunch Program. Please call the National Hunger Hotline at 1-866-3-HUNGRY for more information.
- Corporation for National Community Service (CNCS): Help your school and other local agencies utilize CNCS programs such as AmeriCorps, VISTA, Learn and Serve and Senior Corps to provide community service assistance.

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## Increase Physical Activity Opportunities

Being physically active is just as important to health as eating right. All children, including American Indian / Alaska Native children, need 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous active play every day to grow up to a healthy weight. If this sounds like a lot, consider that 8–to 18–year-olds devote an average of 7.5 hours watching TV and movies, using computers and cell phones, and playing cell phones. Only one-third of high school students get the recommended amount of physical activity.

To increase physical activity, American Indian / Alaska Native children need physical education, safe routes to walk and ride their bikes to school, parks and access to playgrounds and community centers. Native children need access to sports leagues and dance or fitness programs that are exciting and challenging to keep them engaged. In addition to being fun, regular physical activity strengthens bones and muscles, increases self-esteem, and provides many other health benefits. Physical activity, along with eating healthy and traditional foods, can help Native children live healthier lives and perform better in school. *Let's Move!* to increase opportunities for Native youth to be physically active, in school, with their communities, and to create new opportunities for families to be physically active together.

Indian Country can help our American Indian / Alaska Native children get the physical activity they need in many ways. Here are some ideas:

- Earn a **Presidential Active Lifestyle Award** and encourage other groups and organizations to earn one as well. (Register for the *Let's Move! in Indian Country* group at [www.presidentschallenge.org/lmic](http://www.presidentschallenge.org/lmic))
  - Break down barriers that prevent youths' access to physical activity through innovative joint-use agreements.
  - Promote safe routes to school and parks.
  - Encourage your school to use wellness policy guidelines set by Alliance for a Healthier Generation.
  - Establish a local fitness challenge that sets goals for 60 minutes of physical activity a day.
  - Encourage daily, high-quality physical education for students from kindergarten through 12th grade. The goal should be 150 minutes per week for elementary schools and 225 minutes per week for secondary schools.
  - Build physical activity into classroom lessons and core curriculum.
  - Increase options for affordable transportation to parks and open spaces by discounting public transit, altering or expanding school bus routes, and incentivizing ride sharing.
  - Encourage school gyms and fields and community recreation centers and parks to stay open on weekends and after hours to increase access and usage of these facilities.
  - Incorporate pedestrian and bicycle lanes into street development.
  - Enhance public safety near parks and other public spaces.
  - Develop a map that indicates the distance people live from outdoor green spaces and how far parks and other recreational areas are from the majority of the population in your community.
  - Offer physically active intramural sports for students of all skill levels and make sure that it is free and affordable for all children, including children with disabilities.
  - Create or support youth athletic leagues to increase physical activity through competition
  - Promote outdoor activity for families on the reservation and nearby public lands and get ideas from *Let's Move Outside!* (<http://www.letsmove.gov/lets-move-outside>).
  - Encourage the development of traditional, culturally relevant sports like archery, fishing, hunting, canoeing and lacrosse and incorporate elders to teach the important history behind these sports.
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## Make Healthy Food Affordable and Accessible in your communities

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Our ability to eat healthy is compromised when nutritional food is unavailable. Many Native communities are considered to be food deserts, which in the 2008 Farm Bill was defined as "an area in the United States with limited access to affordable and nutritious foods, particularly in a low-income area." This is counterintuitive since many of those communities' local economies are focused on production agriculture. To increase the amount of nutritional food available in the community, local leaders should support healthy food production and locally grown food, including the traditional foods of the Tribe.

Food insecurity and hunger takes a serious toll on the health and well being of the Native American community. Food insecurity occurs when households do not have enough food to meet the needs of all of their members at certain times of the year because they had insufficient money or other resources for food. Research shows that children from food insecure families are 90% more likely to be in fair or poor health and have 30% higher rates of hospitalization compared to food secure children. Additional research has also shown that food insecurity was associated with grade repetition, absenteeism, tardiness, anxiety, aggression, poor mathematics scores, psychosocial dysfunction and difficulty with social interaction among children 6 to 12 years old. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) found that 22.2% of Native American households had low to very low food security over the 1995 to 1997 period, meaning that they did not have access to enough food to meet their basic needs. *Let's Move!* to ensure that all families have access to healthy, affordable food in their communities.

In our effort to fight obesity in American Indian / Alaska Native children and adolescents, it is important that we focus on increasing access to healthy and affordable foods. Here are some ways that Indian Country can play an important role in providing access to affordable and healthy food options through activities such as the following:

- Support Existing and Beginning Farmers: Healthy food does not make itself, but is produced by local farmer and ranchers. Many Tribal communities support Tribally owned agricultural enterprises or Tribal producers because their success is ultimately valuable for the entire community. The USDA has programs to help your community in providing assistance to these agriculture producers. Together the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Grant Program and the 2501 Grant Program for Socially Disadvantaged Producers can assist through competitive grants in providing assistance to producers to ensure that healthy food is not only available but also grown in your community.
- Develop a Food Policy Council that convene various stakeholders and elected officials for the purpose of providing a comprehensive examination of a local food system. A variety of community leaders can be used to analyze how food is grown or brought into their local community. Not only can these groups analyze the existing local food system, but this can also be used as a tool by the community to reconnect with traditional practices and foods. USDA's Community Food Project can assist Food Policy Councils in these creative approaches to meeting the local food needs.
- Capture and Utilize Traditional Knowledge: The history of agriculture in this country began well before its formation in places like the cornfields of the Southwest and the ricing lakes in the Upper Midwest. Many Tribal leaders are utilizing various programs to connect their communities to traditional knowledge of food and agriculture such as HHS' Social and Economic Development Strategies Program and IHS' Special Diabetes Program for Indians. One extremely important piece to this collective action is the gathering of Native seeds in Tribal seed banks which can be assisted through programs such as the CDC Native Diabetes Wellness Program's "Using Traditional Foods and Sustainable Ecological Approaches for Diabetes Prevention and Health Promotion in American Indian and Alaska Native Communities" grant programs.
- Start a Farmer's Market: Coordinate local producers and utilize USDA programs to start a market. The Farmer's Market Promotion Program can assist in this development which can include the ability to accept SNAP benefits.
- School /Community Garden Development: School gardens are places that provide the chance for physical activity and educational opportunities. Many Tribal organizations also connect this activity with the teaching of traditional cultural knowledge around food and agriculture.
- Organize a Food Pantry: Partner with your local food bank to host a food pantry at your organization or congregation with healthy options. Visit Feeding America to find the food bank closest to you.
- Pass food policies that require food and beverages purchased with government funds to meet certain nutrition standards.