



WHITE HOUSE TASK FORCE ON CHILDHOOD OBESITY

One Year Progress Report

FEBRUARY 2011





February 9, 2011

Dear Mr. President:

I am pleased to present you with a progress report on the work of the interagency Childhood Obesity Task Force, which you established one year ago today. While much of our work has been focused on putting infrastructure in place and laying a foundation for longer-term policy change, we are already seeing significant signs of progress in communities across the nation. Given that childhood obesity affects families from all backgrounds and income levels, we are encouraged to see so many Americans coming together to address the challenge of ending this epidemic within a generation.

The report we submitted to you last May, *Solving the Problem of Childhood Obesity Within a Generation*, reflected the contributions of twelve federal agencies, and was informed by more than 2,500 suggestions we received from a broad range of citizens and experts. We structured our recommendations around the same four pillars that support the First Lady's *Let's Move!* initiative: (1) empowering parents and caregivers to make healthy choices for their families; (2) serving healthier food in schools; (3) ensuring access to healthy, affordable food; and (4) increasing physical activity. The Task Force report also included a chapter on obesity prevention in early childhood. This report we are providing to you today highlights Task Force accomplishments in each of these five areas, describes the pivotal role that the First Lady's initiative has played, and provides a preview of our plans for the coming year.

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act

A top priority for us this past year was to pass child nutrition legislation that expands children's access to healthy school meals. We succeeded, and the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act was enacted in December with strong bipartisan support. This historic legislation will help children get the nutrition they need to learn, grow and succeed in school and in life. Among the highlights of the Act are:

- Providing additional funding to schools that meet updated nutritional standards for school meals, through the first real reimbursement rate increase in over 30 years.
- Increasing the number of eligible children enrolled in school meal programs by directly certifying children using data from other federal assistance programs. For high poverty communities, the Act allows for more universal free meal access, to increase the number of "hunger-free" schools.
- Giving USDA the authority to set nutritional standards for all foods regularly sold in schools during the school day, including vending machines, the "a la carte" lunch lines, and school stores.
- Making other important improvements in nutrition programs that serve young children, including WIC and the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

Task Force Highlights

Early Childhood

The risk of obesity starts early in life. Over half of obese children become overweight by the age of two, and approximately one in five children are overweight or obese by their 6th birthday. As the Task Force

report noted, child care settings present a tremendous opportunity to prevent obesity by making an impact at a pivotal phase in children's lives. More than 3.5 million infants and young children are cared for in child care centers, where they spend more than 30 hours per week on average, and many more are cared for through less formal arrangements. HHS moved quickly to implement one of the Task Force recommendations in this area, by working with several national organizations, including the American Public Health Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics, to develop and release a set of new national standards for nutrition, physical activity, and screen time in all early care settings. These standards were released in July and are also now available in Spanish.

Another strategy identified by the Task Force to help our youngest children begin life on a healthy path is to support breastfeeding, which reduces the risk of obesity. While 75% of women initially breastfeed their baby, only 43% are still breastfeeding at all after six months. To support mothers who choose to breastfeed, the Administration is pursuing several new efforts. First, the Affordable Care Act now requires employers to provide reasonable break times and private space for nursing mothers to express breast milk at work, up until a child's first birthday. The Department of Labor has released basic information to employers about how to comply with this new law, and has invited public comment on certain aspects of the agency's interpretation of the law. Second, as the nation's largest employer and a leader in advancing workforce policies that promote the well-being and productivity of American workers and their families, the federal government is working to provide reasonable break times and private space for all nursing mothers in the federal civilian workforce. Third, HHS has created a new online resource (www.healthcare.gov/news/factsheets/breastfeeding.html) to provide comprehensive information for women who make the decision to breastfeed, their employers, and their health providers. Other related initiatives are under development as well.

Empowering Parents and Caregivers

Providing parents and caregivers with clear and actionable information that they can use to make healthy choices is critically important. Last month, USDA and HHS released the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which form the basis of all federal nutrition policy. These guidelines provide authoritative advice on good dietary habits to promote health and prevent chronic disease. For the first time, the recent Dietary Guidelines included a direct focus on obesity prevention and call for changes in food products in the marketplace. To help simplify and translate this nutritional guidance for everyday use, USDA will soon be unveiling a "next generation Food Pyramid."

As parents seek to make healthy choices, the Task Force has focused on fostering environments to support and clarify these choices. The Affordable Care Act includes a "menu labeling" provision requiring restaurants and vending machine operators with 20 or more locations to provide visible information about the calories in their food and make other nutrition information available as well. The FDA will be publishing proposed implementation regulations this spring. The FDA has also been exploring "front-of-pack" labeling approaches that consumers will notice, trust, understand, and use to make healthier food choices when shopping. Last fall, the Institute of Medicine completed Phase I of a study to determine the most effective approaches to front-of-pack labels and plans to submit its final report to the FDA later this year. In the meantime, food companies have come together and taken the first step of dedicating space for an industry-wide front-of-pack label on their products.

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To make sure that parents have the information they need about their children's health, the Task Force set a goal of 100% of physicians assessing Body Mass Index (BMI) at all well-child and adolescent visits by 2012. This effort will be aided by a provision in the Affordable Care Act that requires all new health insurance plans to cover screenings for obesity and counseling on sustained weight loss without charging any out of pocket costs. The Task Force and *Let's Move!* are working with national associations that have committed to advance BMI screening and we are implementing new policies within federally-supported health care programs. The American Academy of Pediatrics has pledged 100% BMI screening among its membership and is developing a structure to monitor adherence to this policy. In addition, the Health Resources and Services Administration at HHS has implemented a new data collection measure for all federally-supported community health centers that tracks BMI assessment and counseling for child and adolescent patients. Over five million children are served by these community health centers and will benefit from this policy change.

Healthy Food in Schools

We made great progress this past year in improving children's access to healthy food in schools with the enactment of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, as noted above. Some provisions of this legislation will take several months, or even years, to implement fully, due to certain timetables built into the Act and the established regulatory process. However, USDA has already taken a critical first step, by last month releasing a proposed rule to update the nutrition standards for meals served through the National School Lunch and School Breakfast programs. The new proposed meal requirements, based on recommendations from the Institute of Medicine, would:

- significantly increase fruit and vegetables served at breakfast and lunch;
- increase whole grains served;
- provide only low-fat or non-fat milk with meals; and
- establish calorie maximums (as well as minimums) for the first time.

While the regulatory process moves forward, many schools are already voluntarily stepping forward and making policy changes. The HealthierUS School Challenge is a USDA initiative that encourages schools to implement rigorous standards for the foods served in schools, physical activity, meal participation among eligible children, and nutrition education. Schools all across the nation are taking the Challenge and being recognized for their success. USDA is currently working towards a goal of certifying 1250 schools as HealthierUS Challenge Schools by the end of the current school year. To make it easier for schools to participate, USDA has simplified the application and streamlined the process so that entire school districts can submit a single application. We are pleased by the response to this initiative, with schools from New Orleans, Louisiana to Grand Forks, North Dakota being recognized for their efforts.

Access to Healthy, Affordable Food

Limited access to healthy foods can contribute to a poor diet and lead to higher levels of obesity. The Administration's Healthy Food Financing Initiative has the goal of eliminating "food deserts" in America in seven years, and brings together the expertise and resources of the Department of Treasury, USDA, and HHS to increase access to healthy and affordable foods. Effective interventions under this initiative will also create jobs, help revitalize distressed communities and open up new markets for farmers to

sell their products. The three federal partners have collaboratively identified the food deserts across America and are working to develop common evaluation measures of the short- and long-term impacts of efforts to eliminate food deserts. The first of several components to launch was the Department of Treasury release of its FY11 Notice of Funding Availability for the Community Development Financial Institution program. Approximately 45 of the CDFI program applicants indicated interest in receiving a supplemental Healthy Food Financing application. Our proposal, which is currently pending in Congress, is for approximately \$25 million awarded through this program to support credit, capital, and financial services to finance food desert interventions in urban and rural communities. In the coming months, additional federal opportunities will be announced, including an estimated \$250 million of New Markets Tax Credit authority to help raise private sector financing, \$20 million from HHS' Community Economic Development program, and a number of USDA program announcements that will support the development of food desert-related projects and strategies.

Increasing Physical Activity

Physical activity is an essential component of obesity prevention and a healthy lifestyle. Emerging science also shows physical activity can promote academic achievement. Many of our efforts this year involved the integration of nutrition and physical activity programs, to provide a more comprehensive approach to childhood obesity prevention. We have also focused on activities aimed at building physical activity habits among young people by promoting the Presidential Active Lifestyle Award. Several national organizations and sports leagues are committing to helping over one million Americans achieve an Active Lifestyle Award by September 2011.

This past June, you signed an executive order that broadened the mission of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports (now called the President's Council on Fitness, Sports, and Nutrition) to include a focus on healthy eating as well as physical fitness. Sixteen Council members have been sworn in and are actively expanding national interest and providing quality guidance on physical activity and good nutrition. In addition, you signed into law this past December legislation that creates a Congressionally-chartered foundation to raise funds and carry out activities to support and supplement the mission of the Council. Consistent with the direction of Congress, Secretary Sebelius will be appointing board members soon, so the foundation can get up and running and carrying out this important mission.

The Department of Education also integrated new requirements for applicants to the Carol White Physical Education Program (PEP) to improve nutrition programming as well as physical education. Nearly 80 PEP grantees are now implementing policies that encourage students to eat healthy foods in addition to adhering to state-based physical education requirements. Limiting the type of "competitive foods" sold in school and improving food placement and pricing in the cafeteria to support healthy choices are just a few examples of the innovative activities grantees are undertaking.

Let's Move!

Also one year ago, the First Lady launched *Let's Move!*, a nationwide initiative to engage and mobilize all sectors of society to advance the Administration's goal of solving the problem of childhood obesity in a generation. The *Let's Move!* initiative, which is closely coordinated with other White House offices and federal agencies, has sparked national interest and significant action toward accomplishing many Task

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Force recommendations. The First Lady is raising public awareness, reaching out to key constituencies, and motivating leaders from across the country to make meaningful commitments to tackle this problem head-on. These include several significant private-sector commitments. The food and beverage industry has started to answer the call to provide parents with better nutritional information and healthier food products. Beverage companies are putting calorie information on the front of their packages. Sixteen of the nation's largest food companies have pledged to cut a total of 1 trillion calories from their products by 2012 and 1.5 trillion by 2015. And the nation's largest corporation has announced a nutrition charter that pledges to reformulate food products, eliminate price premiums for healthier options, and develop a simple front-of-package seal so shoppers can quickly identify healthy choices. The independent Partnership for a Healthier America will hold these organizations accountable, to ensure that these and other commitments are not empty promises, but rather meaningful and sustainable actions to promote the health of the nation.

Looking Ahead

In the coming year, the Task Force will continue to implement new laws and authorities enacted in 2010, with a focus on nutritional standards for school food and menu labeling in restaurants. HHS will continue to promote clear and actionable nutritional guidance to Americans by proposing improvements and updates to the Nutrition Facts Label that appears on virtually all food products. These proposed changes will include modernizing the serving sizes, updating the daily values, and improving the format to help consumers make healthier choices. HHS and other Task Force members will also continue to advance comprehensive community-level obesity prevention strategies, which can be supported by the Prevention and Public Health Fund established in the Affordable Care Act.

The Task Force will launch new and expanded early childhood initiatives in 2011. We will place a significant focus on child care settings. HHS will work with state licensing agencies to help them understand the potential impact of adopting the new national standards. The federal government will also "lead by example" and start integrating the new standards into the nearly 400 child care programs that we directly fund. And we will encourage and recognize individual child care programs and providers that make changes consistent with the new national standards. The Task Force will also enhance current federal efforts to assist hospitals in improving maternity care practices consistent with the international "Baby-Friendly" standards.

The Task Force and the First Lady's *Let's Move!* initiative will continue to collaborate closely to bring about long-term policy and systems change across America. We are supported in this effort by the many federal agencies and other public and private organizations who have made significant contributions this past year, and stand ready to continue to advance Task Force recommendations in the years to come.

Sincerely,



Melody C. Barnes

Chair, Task Force on Childhood Obesity and Director, Domestic Policy Council