

Executive Summary



Today over half of New Mexico adults are overweight or obese, double the number since 1990. Nearly one quarter of NM high school students and one fifth of 2-5 year olds who participate in the WIC Program are at risk for overweight or overweight. These rates show no signs of slowing down.

Overweight and obesity contribute to developing chronic conditions like heart disease, diabetes, cancer and arthritis, diminish quality of life, and create a significant economic burden on employers, the healthcare system and society as a whole. More children than ever before are overweight, and are likely to be overweight adults.

The New Mexico Department of Health Physical Activity & Nutrition Program for Healthier Weight with over 150 partners recently concluded an extensive, inclusive process to examine the problem of overweight and obesity in New Mexico and what organizations can do to address it. Those partners helped develop key recommendations and are committed to putting them into action.

Partners envision a state where New Mexicans value and enjoy optimal health in communities where it's easy to be active and make good nutritional choices. Families, communities, organizations, businesses and government work effectively together to create a vibrant, healthy society where health disparities no longer exist and obesity, overweight and related chronic disease rates are low.

New Mexicans are largely aware that regular physical activity and healthful eating can reduce the risk of developing chronic health conditions, manage weight, and improve quality of life. Yet just half of all New Mexico adults get the minimum recommended amount of exercise, and one quarter are not active at all. Less than a quarter eat five or more fruit and vegetable servings daily. Specific education that addresses behavior change skills and increasing social support is effective in improving these behaviors for many individuals.

Health promotion focused on individual behavior change is important, but by itself is not effective enough to reduce the obesity epidemic. Changes to the environment and to policies that reduce barriers to being physically active and choosing healthful foods and beverages, combined with other successful strategies, must be put into place. Other complex contributors to unhealthy weight gain also must be recognized and addressed.

New Mexico communities need to work together with their policy makers, planners, educators, and businesses, to create the physical, social, political and economic environments that will support children and adults to make healthful choices in all settings.

Recommendations

- To improve effectiveness, all programs that conduct physical activity, nutrition and overweight or obesity activities should:
 - * Focus activities in key areas
 - Increase physical activity
 - Reduce TV and other screen time
 - Increase fruit and vegetable intake
 - Educate on portion control
 - Increase breastfeeding rates
 - Reduce sweetened beverage consumption
 - * Initiate activities in a variety of settings (community and regional planning, education systems, families and communities, healthcare systems, food systems, worksites)
 - * Initiate activities in multiple levels of influence (individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, public policy)
 - * Target efforts towards populations shown to be at greatest risk:
 - Children and adolescents and their families, and adults;
 - Residents of the Southeast and Northwest regions of the state;
 - People of Hispanic and Native American ethnicities;
 - People who earn less than \$10,000 per year.
 - * Include an evaluation component to assess the effectiveness of programs

- Policy makers, voluntary organizations and advocacy groups should seek opportunities to create and enhance policies and environments that support individuals to be more physically active and make healthful food and beverage choices.

- Healthcare providers, administrators and payors need to develop consistent policies and practices to support promotion of healthier weight in clinical settings.

These recommendations come from an international pool of evidence-based programs that have been rigorously examined for effectiveness, and from the expressed needs of New Mexico communities. Many of these recommendations are already in place, but only in a select few programs throughout the state.

No one organization can accomplish such broad objectives, and no single source of funds currently exists to support needed activities. Partnerships need to be developed and strengthened, and significant financial resources must be dedicated to this important health issue.

Clear, accurate and science-based information will need to be gathered and disseminated to health care providers, educators, administrators, legislators, and community based groups. Organizations will be more effective if they are on the same page with state of the art information and strategies to prevent and control obesity and overweight.

To coordinate strategies and monitor progress made towards these recommendations, the New Mexico Healthier Weight Council is being created. This Council will be comprised of and will connect partners from numerous organizations who are working on issues related to physical activity, healthful nutrition, overweight and obesity. It will convene under the general guidance of the New Mexico Department of Health Physical Activity & Nutrition Program for Healthier Weight.

The Council will focus the efforts of diverse partners, creating a single, more powerful entity to mobilize around important issues. Most importantly, the Council represents the first ever statewide collaboration of partners from a variety of organizations specifically organized to address obesity and overweight in New Mexico. Through its efforts and those of other key partners statewide, the vision of a healthy, vibrant New Mexico will be realized.

