

# Cities' Role in Reversing the Obesity Epidemic

Due to the rapid rise in obesity, today's youth may—for the first time in modern history—live shorter lives than their parents.<sup>1</sup>

Cities and their residents are facing increased health care costs and diminished quality of life due to the epidemic of obesity and overweight. City leaders across California are stepping up to help stem the obesity epidemic in their communities. This fact sheet is intended to help city council members and executive city staff see how municipalities can help reduce obesity and overweight through policies that advance healthy eating and active living.



## Obesity and Overweight Cost Cities in Health Care, Preventable Disease, and Lost Productivity

*California's children are suffering from overweight and its effects:*

- On average, one in four California youth between the ages of 9 and 16 is overweight; in many California cities, that statistic is one in three
- More children are being diagnosed with diseases linked to overweight and obesity previously seen only in adults, such as Type 2 diabetes and heart disease
- Overweight children are far more likely to be obese as adults<sup>2</sup>

*California's adults face serious problems from obesity:*

- More than half of California's adults are overweight or obese: 23 percent are obese and another 35 percent are overweight<sup>3</sup>
- Obese adults face increased risks for many chronic conditions: diabetes, heart disease, cancer, arthritis, stroke, and hypertension<sup>4</sup>
- Each year in California, obesity is directly or indirectly responsible for hundreds of deaths and thousands of hospitalizations<sup>5</sup>
- In 2006, the annual cost to California—in medical bills, workers compensation and lost productivity—for overweight, obesity, and physical inactivity was \$41 billion<sup>6</sup>



**The Healthy Eating Active Living Cities Campaign** provides training and technical assistance to help city officials adopt policies that improve their communities' physical activity and retail food environments. Supporting healthy choices is essential to address the obesity epidemic among California's children and adults, currently costing the state more than \$41 billion annually in healthcare and lost productivity.

The Campaign, funded by Kaiser Permanente and the Vitamin Cases Consumer Settlement Fund, is a partnership of the League of California Cities, the California Center for Public Health Advocacy, and the Cities Counties and Schools Partnership.

*This fact sheet is one in a series providing background and policy ideas for healthy cities.*

[www.HealCitiesCampaign.org](http://www.HealCitiesCampaign.org)



### Low-Income Communities Fare Worst

Rates of obesity are highest and have risen most rapidly among people of color and in low-income communities, where choices for healthy eating and physical activity are limited.<sup>7</sup> Even after accounting for individual risk factors such as socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity, living in a community that has a lot more unhealthy food outlets is associated with significantly higher rates of obesity and diabetes than living in a community with more opportunities to buy healthy food.<sup>4</sup>

### Cities Have an Important Role in Obesity Prevention

Increasingly, policymakers, advocates, and health care providers are recognizing the influence of community factors on health,<sup>8</sup> including the following:

- Local access to healthy foods
- Safe places to play and be active
- Opportunities for people to walk and bike within their neighborhoods

City councils can improve the physical activity and food environments in their cities and contribute to preventing obesity among their employees and residents through:

- Internal personnel policies
- Land use decisions
- Redevelopment priorities
- Community and economic development plans

In conjunction with leaders from 100 California Cities, the Healthy Eating Active Living Cities Campaign has developed policy recommendations that could improve the food and physical activity environments in communities, available at [www.HealCitiesCampaign.org](http://www.HealCitiesCampaign.org).

### The Benefits to Your City

By adopting one or more of the policies described at [www.HealCitiesCampaign.org](http://www.HealCitiesCampaign.org), your city could see these benefits:

- Cost savings through employee wellness policies and health incentives
- Improved quality of life for residents through active lifestyles
- Improved community connections and civic life through community interactions in parks and public places, slowing people down to see and talk with one another
- Improved public safety and reduced crime by ensuring more “eyes on the street” when residents walk, bike, or run
- Neighborhood recreation options that help keep kids out of the street
- Better-performing kids: healthy kids do better in school, giving them a greater chance to contribute eventually to the region’s economic vitality
- Greater life expectancy for the next generation than predicted under current circumstances
- Creation of attractive destinations that offer good food, multiple activities, and places where people want to spend time and money
- Less traffic congestion and cleaner air as folks leave their cars to ride bicycles and walk
- Contribution to AB 32 and SB 375 goals by increasing walkability and biking and decreasing vehicle miles traveled

### Join the Healthy Eating Active Living Cities Campaign

Go to [www.HealCitiesCampaign.org](http://www.HealCitiesCampaign.org) and let us know what you are doing, or contact the campaign:

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