

National Obesity Action Forum
DESCRIPTION OF THEME DISCUSSION/NETWORKING TABLES
Tuesday, June 6, 2006

In December 2000, the Surgeon General hosted a public listening session on overweight and obesity. The discussions at that meeting centered on activities and interventions in five key settings, which for this portion of the Forum we have expanded to seven, since many of the actions overlap the different settings and can be applied in several or all environments.

1. Families and Communities

Families and communities lie at the foundation of the solution to the problems of overweight and obesity. Family members can share their own knowledge and habits regarding a healthy diet and physical activity with their children, friends and other community members.

The participants in this discussion will emphasize family and community opportunities for communication, education, and for support surrounding the maintenance of healthy dietary choices and physical activity patterns.

2. Schools

Most children spend a large portion of their time in schools, which in turn provide many opportunities to engage students in healthy eating and physical activity, as well as to reinforce healthy diet and physical activity messages.

The participants in this discussion will consider successful public health approaches in schools which go beyond health and physical education. These actions include school policy, the physical and social environment of the school, and the links between schools, families and communities. Regardless of which actions one opts to take, however, the decision must be made at the local level.

3. Health Care

The majority of Americans interact with the health care system, at least once, in any given year. Recommendations by pediatric and adult health care providers can be quite influential in patient dietary choices and physical activity patterns.

The participants in this discussion will explore ways in which health care providers, in collaboration with other agents of change, such as schools and work sites, are reinforcing the adoption and maintenance of healthy lifestyles behaviors. Additionally, the session will report on cases where health care providers have served as effective public policy advocates, hence catalyzing intervention efforts in the family, the community and the media.

4. Work Sites

Most of us spend a good part of our day at a worksite, where we are often aggregated within systems for communication, education and peer support. Worksites, therefore, provide many opportunities to reinforce the adoption and maintenance of healthy lifestyle behaviors.

The participants in this discussion will deal with public health approaches in worksites which extend beyond health education and awareness to include worksite policies, the worksites' physical and social environments, as well as their links with the family and community settings.

5. Built Environments

Public health has traditionally addressed the built environment to tackle specific health issues such as sanitation, lead paint, workplace safety, fire codes, and access for person with disabilities. We are now beginning to realize that how we design the built environment may hold tremendous potential for addressing many of the nation's current public health concerns, including obesity.

The participants in this discussion will explore how the physical environment affects our physical and mental health, and what needs to be done to shift to communities intentionally designed to promote overall well-being by encouraging walking, biking, and related social interaction.

6. Reproductive Health Care

There's a growing awareness that obesity and related conditions have a considerable impact on reproductive health; seen commonly in limiting contraceptive choices, or in their affect on the progress of pregnancy, as well as across a wide range of reproductive health concerns.

The participants in this discussion will review recent research examining these relationships, covering the major reproductive events of the lifespan, from puberty to menopause.

7. Engaging the Community

Effective actions for combating overweight and obesity must occur at multiple levels and, among the latter, one of the more vital is engaging the community, on equal terms, to empower its members and to increase their understanding of the factors contributing to the obesity epidemic.

The participants in this discussion will highlight programs that support healthful food and physical activity choices to community decision makers. Additionally, the exchange will focus on the principles of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) "Strategic Prevention and Framework" to help guide federal, state and community prevention work and, as such is can be adopted to help address a range of public health problems, including obesity.