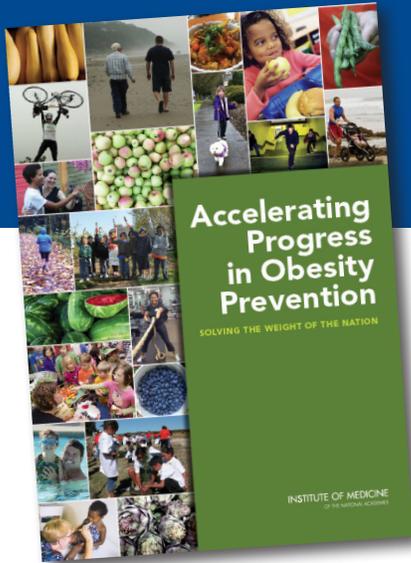


Accelerating Progress in Obesity Prevention

SOLVING THE WEIGHT OF THE NATION

AN EXPERT REPORT FROM THE INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE



The Challenges We Face: More than one-third of adults and close to one-fifth of children and adolescents in the United States are obese. Obesity’s effects on health and health care costs could become catastrophic. While many communities are taking important steps to reduce the epidemic, accelerating progress is critical. Success requires action from all of us in the places where we live, work, learn, and play. Progress in one area will reinforce progress in others.

Activating Employers

Employed adults spend a quarter of their lives at the workplace, making it an ideal setting for promoting healthy eating and active living. Obesity is increasing employer costs, economic and otherwise. Because employers bear direct medical and indirect productivity costs of obesity, they can benefit from promoting and increasing physical activity, healthy eating, breastfeeding, and overall well-being in the workplace.

Why should we strive to bring this vision to life?

Activating workplaces to promote wellness has substantial benefits for employees and employers.

TODAY’S REALITY

28 percent of employees in the private sector and 54 percent in the public sector had access to worksite wellness programs in 2008.

24 states and the District of Columbia have laws about workplace breastfeeding support.

TOMORROW’S VISION

All private and public sector employees have access to and use worksite wellness programs, including physical activity, nutrition education, and healthy eating.

All employers provide breastfeeding-friendly environments.

All states have laws requiring workplace breastfeeding support.

See the other solutions in this series:

- Schools
- Food and Drink
- Physical Activity
- Marketing
- Health Care

How could this vision come to life in your workplace?

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- Provide opportunities for physical activity, such as short scheduled activity breaks and a safe walking path near the workplace.
- Have occasional walking meetings instead of sitting around a conference table.
- Support community programs that offer physical activity for employees and their families.

NUTRITION

- Make healthy foods and beverages available everywhere they are sold.
- Offer onsite purchase of fruits and vegetables, such as a farmer's market.

OTHER

- Offer employees and their dependents insurance coverage for obesity-related services and programs.
- Provide incentives for participation in weight loss and health promotion efforts.
- Subsidize membership fees for outside wellness or weight loss programs during the workday or at the workplace.
- Ensure private space and adequate break time for breastfeeding mothers.

Why should we strive to bring this vision to life?

Evidence shows that...

- Employees who are overweight or obese have higher use of sick leave and disability benefits, more workplace injuries, higher health care costs, and lower productivity than normal-weight employees.
- Workplace wellness programs benefit employers through:
 - reduced employee turnover
 - reduced costs associated with chronic disease
 - decreased absenteeism
 - increased worker morale and satisfaction
- Workplace wellness programs benefit employees through:
 - greater productivity and improved fitness and health
 - fewer sick days
 - social support for health-promoting activities
- Workplace breastfeeding support programs improve productivity and staff loyalty, decrease absenteeism, health care costs, and employee turnover, and enhance the employer's public image.

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