

**Starting Earlier-Preventing Overweight in Early Childhood:
A Forum for California Leaders and Decision Makers
Tuesday, February 7, 2006
Sierra Health Foundation, Sacramento**

“MORNING AFTER” SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

Background

California’s obesity prevention efforts, including both state- and foundation-funded interventions, are largely focused on school-age children and adults, with an emphasis on changing school environments and social marketing. Relatively little has been done to study conditions and test environmental interventions (as opposed to health education campaigns) in settings with children from infancy to age five.

The California WIC Association believes that more attention needs to be paid to what immediate and longer-term practical steps can be taken at an earlier age to make healthy eating and activity the easy and affordable choice for young families. Parents, early childhood advocates, and providers need information, tools, and resources so that they can begin to bring focus and energy to protect very young – and particularly vulnerable -- children from early and long-lasting harm. A strong alliance, working together to clean up their food and activity environments, can make a difference.

A Great Meeting!

Yesterday, the work of forming such an alliance began. Over seventy key leaders, early childhood experts, advocates and frontline representatives gathered at a day-long forum to begin to address the issues which put our youngest children at risk for childhood obesity – and how we can strengthen prevention through collaborative policy efforts over the next five years. The turnout was strong, and the energy and “buzz” in the room was high!

After a welcome and pep talk from Laurie True, the morning speakers, consultants Sarah Samuels and Jane Heinig, gave an overview of the issues and shared the results of their look into what the data and research show, and what Forum attendees themselves told us about taking the leap from focusing solely on individual behavior change, to encouraging changes in environments in order to prevent obesity, starting at a younger age.

The documents they shared, and their powerpoint presentations, are posted on this site.

Then, four content experts made brief suggestions for policy approaches and policy levers that might be explored as we frame and flesh out a long-term policy agenda for a multi-year Starting Earlier campaign. Dr. Scott Gee described how Kaiser Permanente has been revamping it’s approaches to child overweight prevention and management, a model program that includes everything from BMI training for providers, to new Farmer’s Markets, to Baby Friendly Hospitals. Patti Miller from Children Now discussed challenges and opportunities facing advocates working to protect young children from virulent and pervasive food industry marketing. Leslie Mikkelsen from Strategic Alliance helped us make the connections between the needs of young families and toddlers and

the burgeoning efforts to improve the built environment. Donita Stromgren from California Child Care Resource & Referral Network, shed some light on the complex world of child care and preschool policymaking and funding.

Small groups worked in the afternoon to come up with specific key policy strategies that will support early childhood institutions and families in improving their nutrition and physical activity. They laid out the barriers, key players, and resources needed to tackle the various options.

After a report back, Laurie asked attendees to form a Steering Committee to frame a Policy Blueprint based on the day's work, which will be shared with the full group before going forward as a working document. Strong commitments from key representatives present at the meeting were obtained, allowing us to feel empowered and ready to continue work on this initiative.

Next Steps

1. By April, Jane Heinig and her staff will sort and analyze the small group work, and provide a summary document in a month or so.
2. In April, CWA and California Head Start Association will co-sponsor a meeting of interested leaders, to broaden participation in this effort among the child care community, at the CAEYC conference in Southern California.
3. By June, the newly formed Steering Committee will create a draft Policy Blueprint for all to review, and propose action steps for the coming year.
4. By August, CWA will work to secure legislative support for an Interim Hearing on Preventing Obesity in Early Childhood, to be held in late 2006 or early 2007.
5. By December, a Final Policy Blueprint will be released, with endorsement from all key stakeholder groups.
6. By February, the full group – with additional members – will reconvene to assess progress and formulate plans for another year of work.

Please check back to this site for updates and further information!