

ENACTING EIGHT POLICIES TO PREVENT CHILDHOOD OBESITY: PROJECTED OUTCOMES FOR LOUISIANA

This brief reports the projected reduction in Louisiana’s childhood obesity prevalence if eight nutrition and physical activity policies are enacted, comparing the outcomes at maximum or moderate strength if they are implemented within the upcoming year or in four years.

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Policy Goals

- Prevent children from becoming overweight or obese.
- Facilitate healthy eating habits.
- Promote physical activity and active transportation.

What Does the Research Tell Us?

- Obese children are likely to become obese adults and to develop serious chronic diseases, like heart disease or diabetes, that may decrease the quality and length of their lives.²⁶
- Without policy interventions, the prevalence of obesity is expected to either plateau or continually increase in the forthcoming decades.

Current Policy Environment in Louisiana

- The nutrition and physical activity policies were chosen based on their potential impact to reduce childhood obesity, their feasibility to implement before 2020, and existing legislative momentum in the state.
- There are very few existing policies that are implemented and enforced that may help reduce the rate of childhood obesity.

Achieving Maximum Intervention Results

- A maximum intervention scenario would reflect a comprehensive, strategic, multi-faceted statewide movement to enact and implement legislation related to the highlighted nutrition and physical activity policies (see individual policy briefs for more detailed information).

Policy Interventions

Nutrition	Physical Activity
1. Junk Food Relative Pricing	5. Physical Activity Access
2. Junk Food Counter-marketing	6. Physical Activity Promotion
3. Fruit and Vegetable Access	7. Physical Activity in Schools
4. Fruit and Vegetable Promotion	8. Physical Activity in Child Care

WAYS TO SUPPORT: Nutrition and Physical Activity Policies

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- Become involved in the legislative process by keeping up to date with the current legislative agenda; make your opinion heard by calling or emailing your legislators’ offices asking them to support policies that promote healthy lifestyles for all residents.
- Express concerns and wishes to promote health at your neighborhood and civic association gatherings, city council and town hall meetings, and your state and local government representatives’ meetings.
- Get involved in your child’s School Wellness Council. Talk to school administrators about starting a Wellness Council if your child’s school doesn’t have one.
- Support local biking and pedestrian advocacy groups; participate in their physical activity and safety awareness events.
- Volunteer with organizations that provide healthy foods to those in need.

Projected Effect on Louisiana's Childhood Obesity Prevalence

The results in the table below show the reduction in childhood obesity with the enactment of eight nutrition and physical activity policy areas and illustrates four contrasting scenarios: prevalence if maximum policy conditions begin immediately as opposed to four years and prevalence if moderate conditions begin immediately versus in four years.

PRISM Results: Percent Change in Childhood Obesity if All Policies are Implemented Simultaneously				
Policy Strength	Maximum (100%)	Maximum (100%)	Moderate (50%)	Moderate (50%)
Year Implemented	2013	2016	2013	2016
% Change [ROU [^]]	↓ 26% [20-33%]	↓ 19% [14-24%]	↓ 12% [8-15%]	↓ 9% [6-11%]

[^] ROU refers to the Range of Uncertainty determined by the PRISM sensitivity analysis.

Note: The symbol ↓ signifies that the percent change is negative, and the percent represents a decrease.

- Within the PRISM model, implementing all policies at maximum strength in 2013 would have achieved the greatest reduction in childhood obesity prevalence in the model.
- As the legislative regular session for 2013 has passed, it is beneficial to aim for policy implementation in 2016 to see a 19% [Range of Uncertainty: 14-24%] decrease in childhood obesity.

Implementing the Policy

In combination with personal responsibility for maintaining a healthy lifestyle, supporting and enacting policies that facilitate healthy eating choices and physical activity for youth and adults may positively affect population-level health outcomes. Many community organizations, faith-based organizations, schools, and local governments have already taken steps to improve and increase the quality and quantity of health-promotion opportunities within their authority. Currently, not all of Louisiana's children receive the benefits of these programs and interventions. Therefore, in order to maximize the reach of health-promoting policies, statewide legislation is recommended.

The negative economic, societal, and personal costs of childhood obesity are significant consequences that cannot be underestimated. Too many children are overweight or obese now, and too many of Louisiana's children will be overweight or obese in the future if a strategic, comprehensive, multi-faceted prevention plan is not enacted. Curbing the obesity trend will require long-term commitment and resources from supporters, and the models suggest that it would be advantageous to take more time to build support and increase buy-in for stronger policies. It is important to reiterate that policy interventions might not produce immediate results but may ultimately demonstrate long-term benefits when looking at health outcomes related to childhood obesity and the associated healthcare costs.

! *"Policy has an integral role in community-based obesity prevention. With the increasing availability and quality of evidence of the obesity epidemic and effective interventions to tackle this epidemic, there are ongoing calls for government action to translate the evidence into policy and practice. Policy demonstrates government commitment to obesity prevention and provides a road map for planning, implementing, and evaluating interventions."⁶⁷*
~Lawrence & Swinburn, 2010

! *"While the magnitude of the [obesity] problem is great, the range of potential solutions is even greater. The design of successful interventions and actions for prevention and management of overweight and obesity will require the careful attention of many individuals and organizations working together through multiple spheres of influence."⁶⁶*
~The Surgeon General's Call To Action To Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity, 2001

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