

Municipal Survey Report

Obesity Prevention in New Hampshire Communities

In 2011, the NH Obesity Prevention Program conducted a statewide survey of cities and towns to gather information about policies that support healthy eating and active living.

Why Communities Should Care About Obesity

- Obesity has real economic costs that affect us all. They include **health care, lost productivity (absenteeism and disability), high school graduation, and transportation costs.** ¹
- Nearly 10% of annual **medical spending** is obesity-related. ²
- Obesity increases risk for: ³
 - Heart disease
 - High blood pressure
 - High cholesterol
 - Stroke
 - Type 2 diabetes
 - Cancer
 - Sleep apnea
 - Depression



Everyone Has a Role in Obesity Prevention

- Parents
- Health care professionals
- Schools
- Community-based organizations
- Faith-based organizations
- Private sector companies
- Leaders from all levels of government

“Everyone has a role to play to increase opportunities for healthy living and to reduce childhood obesity.”

National League of Cities ⁶

Obesity and Overweight in New Hampshire

- Adult obesity rates **nearly doubled in the last 15 years.** ³
- **Nearly 2 out of 3 adults are overweight or obese.** ³
- **1 out of 4 high school students are overweight or obese.** ³
- **1 out of 3 third graders are overweight or obese.** ⁴

About the Survey

- Survey questions were based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) *Measures Project*, which recommends strategies and related measures that allow cities and towns to support the availability of healthy food and opportunities for physical activity.⁵ The strategies describe how communities can support and promote:
 - **Daily physical activity**
 - **Affordable healthy food and drink**
 - **Breastfeeding**
 - **New obesity-prevention partnerships**
- The survey was developed by the Obesity Prevention Program with assistance from members of NH’s Regional Planning Commissions. All nine commissions helped distribute the survey.
- Out of the State’s 234 cities and towns, 137 responded; they represent 73% of the State population.
- The survey was sent to city and town representatives and did not include questions about school policies and practices.

Communities Can Adopt Policies That Support Healthy Eating and Active Living



“To reverse the obesity epidemic, we must change our physical and food environments to provide more opportunities for people to eat healthy foods and to be physically active on a daily basis.”

Keener, 2009 ⁵

Physical Activity

A review of US Census and CDC data shows that in communities where more people bike or walk to work, significantly more maintain a healthy weight.⁷ Another study found when neighborhoods have sidewalks on most streets, residents are 47% more likely to get regular physical activity.⁸

Local Policy Ideas

- Make it easier and safer to walk and bicycle:
 - Create and maintain **sidewalks, crosswalks, pedestrian signs, and lighting.**
 - Create **bicycle lanes.**
- Allow use of **school facilities** before and after school hours for community use.
- Enhance safety in and near **parks.**
- Ensure easy access to **public transit** from all neighborhoods.
- In rural areas, create or enhance existing **walking, hiking, and bicycle trails.**



In NH Communities . . .

- 87% report having open play fields
- 86% report having walking and hiking trails
- 84% report having playgrounds and parks
- 70% report having snowshoe or cross-country ski trails
- 48% report having bicycle trails
- 24% report having paved streets with sidewalks
- 4% report having paved streets with bike lanes

Breastfeeding

Formula feeding is associated with a 32% increased risk of obesity later in life.⁹ Supporting breastfeeding promotes healthy babies, mothers, and communities – and saves money. New federal labor rules require certain employers to provide nursing mothers with reasonable break time and private space (not a bathroom) to pump breast milk.¹⁰

Local Policy Ideas

- Support breastfeeding employees, provide sufficient break time and private space (not a bathroom) to pump breast milk.
- Provide a space for breastfeeding customers and clients to nurse their baby or pump milk.



In NH Communities . . .

- 4% have a policy to support employees that choose to breastfeed their babies

Healthy Eating

Research shows when healthy food is tasty, available, and affordable people are more likely to eat better.¹¹

Local Policy Ideas

- Require safe and free drinking water in municipal buildings.
- Adopt healthy vending standards for municipal buildings.
- Offer healthy affordable food in municipal buildings.
- Serve healthy foods and beverages at city and town meetings.
- Add or enhance community gardens and farmers' markets.
- Allow use of town and city land for community gardens.
- Consider regulations that discourage fast food restaurants near schools, parks, and playgrounds.
- Align public transit to promote access to healthy affordable food.
- Make it easier to get healthy foods and beverages in under-served areas by offering incentives to grocery and other food stores to:
 - Open a new store or improve offerings in existing stores.
 - Sell quality fruits and vegetables at affordable prices.



In NH Communities . . .

- 37% have a medium or large grocery store
- 29% have a community garden
- 34% encourage local agriculture
- 57 cities and towns reported 100 farmers' markets

Obesity Prevention Partnerships

Partnerships provide an opportunity to combine resources toward a common goal. Unique collaborations can bring together community resources to achieve greater outcomes. ⁵

Suggested Partners

- Form **partnerships to work together to improve** healthy eating and active living.
- Involve **community and regional partners** to participate in the town's obesity-prevention efforts.
- Explore how your **regional planning commission** can support your efforts.
- **Let's Move Cities, Towns and Counties** outlines five ways elected officials can bring community together to solve the obesity challenge.
- Contact the **Obesity Prevention Program** for more information about local partnerships.

In NH Communities . . .

- 19% have a partnership that addresses healthy eating and active living
- In communities that reported existing partnerships to address physical activity and/or healthy eating, some of the identified partners or coalitions included the:
 - Local Government Center
 - Local businesses
 - Local Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL) coalitions
 - City and town parks and recreation departments



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Healthy people in healthy places

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