



How to Use the Institute of Medicine Childhood Obesity Report To Promote Active Living

OVERVIEW

Obesity, especially among children, is the health crisis of the 21st century. As new findings and research are reported on a daily and weekly basis, it can be difficult to assess the validity and usefulness of new information.

In 2002, Congress charged the Institute of Medicine (IOM) to, “develop a prevention-focused action plan to decrease the prevalence of obesity in children and youth in the United States.” After two years of research, the IOM released the report on September 30, 2004, providing an action plan for researchers, professionals and advocates around the country.

The report, “Preventing Childhood Obesity: Health in the Balance,” examines childhood obesity’s many contributing factors and its devastating consequences for national health.

USING THE REPORT TO SUPPORT HEALTH-PROMOTING PLACES

The IOM is a definitive source of credible, peer-reviewed information about public health. As such, its action plan to address childhood obesity represents one of the most important pieces of supporting information for advocates and professionals working to promote Active Living.

Some ways this landmark report can be applied include the following:

- Promoting Safe Routes to Schools
- Justifying bike and pedestrian infrastructure and programs
- Revising land-use and transportation regulations
- Advocating complete streets, parks and trails
- Speaking with media, elected officials and business leaders

IOM RECOMMENDS PLACES TO SAFELY WALK, BIKE AND PLAY

The centerpiece of the IOM report is 10 detailed recommendations that form an action plan. One of these recommendations specifically addresses the built environment, citing an urgent need to create activity-friendly community design:

Recommendation 7: Built Environment

Local governments, private developers, and community groups should expand opportunities for physical activity including recreational facilities, parks, playgrounds, sidewalks, bike paths, routes for walking or biking to school, and safe streets and neighborhoods, especially for populations at high risk of childhood obesity.

Specific strategies to implement this recommendation include:

- **Revise comprehensive plans, zoning and subdivision ordinances**, and other planning practices to increase availability and accessibility of opportunities for physical activity in new developments.
- **Prioritize capital improvement projects** to increase opportunities for physical activity in existing areas.
- **Improve the street, sidewalk, and street-crossing safety of routes to school**, develop programs to encourage walking and bicycling to school, and build schools within walking and bicycling distance of the neighborhoods they serve.

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

Established by the National Academy of Sciences, the IOM is a nonpartisan assembly of the nation's leading scientific and public health professionals and scholars. Dr. Jeffrey Koplan, chair of the IOM Committee on Prevention of Obesity in Children and Youth, put the report into perspective:

"Children are highly cherished in our society. The value we attach to our children is fundamentally connected to society's responsibility to provide for their growth, development and well-being. Extensive discussions will need to continue beyond this report so that shared understandings are reached and support is garnered for sustained societal and lifestyle changes that will reverse the obesity trends among our children and youth."

Dr. Ross Brownson, department chair at St. Louis University School of Public Health and member of the IOM Committee, put it this way:

"The Institute of Medicine report provides the first comprehensive, evidence-based action plan for tackling the epidemic of childhood obesity on multiple fronts. It includes many useful ideas on changes in the community environment that will increase rates of physical activity in children."

Dr. Jim Sallis, director of Active Living Research and IOM reviewer:

"This landmark report confirms that the factors driving childhood obesity are so ingrained that numerous and large changes in physical environments and policies will be needed to reverse current trends. Education, health, transportation, recreation, food industries, community organizations, media and other sectors of society need to work together to create environments that make it easier for children and their families to choose healthier eating and physical activity habits on a daily basis."

LEARN MORE

To learn more or to download fact sheets from the IOM, visit:
<http://www.iom.edu/report.asp?id=22596>

Copies of "Preventing Childhood Obesity: Health in the Balance" can also be ordered online at www.nap.edu or by calling (888) 624-7645.

The Active Living Network is a project supported by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Additional facts and resources may be found at www.activeliving.org.