



## Five Forums Generate Nutrition and Physical Activity Policy Recommendations

Supporting the Bipartisan Policy Center's Nutrition and Physical Activity Initiative to encourage collaboration on childhood obesity prevention

### SUMMARY

For one year beginning mid-August 2011, staff from the [Bipartisan Policy Center](#) in Washington hosted five public forums to generate policy discussions on improving nutrition and physical activity across the nation. Recommendations drawn from discussions at the forums are included in a 105-page report entitled *Lots to Lose: How America's Health and Obesity Crisis Threatens our Economic Future*.<sup>1</sup>

The co-chairs of the initiative were:

- Dan Glickman, former secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and member, U.S. House of Representatives (D-Kansas)
- Mike Leavitt, former governor of Utah and former secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- Donna Shalala, former secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- Ann Veneman, former secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture

Prior to the forums, the project team and co-chairs conferred individually with hundreds of stakeholders to gain perspective on gaps in existing policies and to identify opportunities where the initiative could make the most impact.

These individuals ranged from local changemakers (e.g., grassroots organizers, city planners, school food service directors) to national leaders (e.g., director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, health coordinator at the National Governors Association (which represents state interests), and business leaders (e.g., Compass Foods, a food services company). The team also kept people up to date on the project through a monthly newsletter.

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<sup>1</sup> *Lots to Lose: How America's Health and Obesity Crisis Threatens our Economic Future*. Washington: Bipartisan Policy Center, 2012. Available [online](#).

The five forums—one in Miami, one in Salt Lake City, and three in Washington—drew 450 participants and audience members. Each forum, led by a panel of health leaders and experts, focused on discrete policy issues. For example, the Miami forum focused on nutrition and physical activity in medicine as well as the role of large institutions. The Salt Lake City forum focused on efforts to modify the built environment to make it easier for residents to exercise and eat a healthy diet.

The team launched the *Lots to Lose* report in Washington with a public event attended by some 150 people. Media coverage about the release—for example, by outlets such as MSNBC, Fox Business Network, the *Hill*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Atlantic*—was extensive, project staff reported.

See the [Bibliography](#) for details about the report, articles, blog posts, and the initiative’s website.

## Key Recommendations

The *Lots to Lose* report lists 26 practical recommendations, along with rationales and specific action steps, to improve nutrition and physical activity across the nation. The recommendations focus in five areas: families, schools, workplaces, communities, and cross-cutting opportunities. Project Director Lisel Loy identified six “priority” recommendations that the project team will work to implement first:

- The U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Agriculture should extend federal guidelines for diet and physical activity to all children under six and enhance public awareness and understanding of these guidelines. Given the importance of establishing healthy patterns for diet and activity in very young children, these agencies should take the following specific actions:
  - Develop, implement, and promote national dietary guidelines for the first thousand days, covering pregnant women and children up to two years old
  - Develop national physical activity guidelines for children under six years old
  - Support these guidelines by developing an effective national strategy for disseminating this information and educating parents about the benefits of first foods (the ones introduced to babies after cereal) and physical activity, particularly for populations most at risk for poor nutrition and health
- Nutrition and physical activity training should be incorporated in all phases of medical education—medical schools, residency programs, credentialing processes, and continuing education requirements.

The medical education and licensing system currently is not set up to ensure that health professionals have the incentive and expertise to effectively and consistently deliver messages about weight, chronic disease, diet, and physical activity.

- Public and private insurers should structure incentives to reward effective, community-based, prevention-oriented services that have demonstrated the capacity to reduce costs significantly over time.

Because many community-based, preventive health care services are not currently covered by either public or private insurers, creating new reimbursement mechanisms or reforming existing ones to cover these types of services is critical to realizing the potential benefits of a broader, wellness-focused approach to health care.

- Large, private-sector institutions should procure and serve healthier foods, using their significant market power to shift food supply chains and make healthier options more available and cost-competitive.
- The Ad Council or similar organizations should coordinate a multimedia campaign to promote healthy diet and physical activity, funded by leading private sector companies in collaboration with federal agencies.
- Public- and private-sector organizations active in this field should partner to establish a national clearinghouse on health-related nutrition and physical activity initiatives. The clearinghouse should provide links to further resources, technical assistance, coordination and partnership opportunities, as well as up-to-date research findings.

## Lessons Learned

1. Support recommendations with sufficient detail about implementation. Many innovations that address nutrition and physical activity lack reliable data about their implementation and potential impact. The project team worked with expert consultants and partners to identify the best evidence from demonstrations in the field that are showing promising impact so that their recommendations would be both concrete and achievable. (Project Director/Loy)

## Funding

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) supported this project through a grant of \$407,226. W.K. Kellogg Foundation provided an additional \$250,000.

## Afterward

In 2013, the project team and the four co-chairs are working with other leaders in the field to advance the six priority recommendations listed above. Specific activities include:

- Participating in the “Working Group on Future Directions for Implementing Nutrition across the Continuum of Medical Education, Training and Research,” sponsored by the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute and the National Institutes of Health

- Helping design a Wellness Track for the 2013 meeting of the Clinton Global Initiative America
- Collaborating with the Bipartisan Policy Center’s Health Care Cost Containment Initiative (funded by RWJF<sup>2</sup>) by helping to quantify the cost savings potential of obesity prevention. Read [background paper](#) for more information about the initiative.

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