

2023 Assembly Speaker's Task Force on Childhood Obesity
Public Hearing Comments
October 23, 2023

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Thank you, Representatives Hurd and Vining and all taskforce members, for the opportunity to speak.

- My name is Amber Canto and I serve as the Director of the Health & Well-Being Institute at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension. In this capacity, I serve as project director for the *Kemamacqtaq: We're All Moving* project you just heard about from my colleague, Jennifer Gauthier. I also provide leadership to our statewide community-based nutrition program called FoodWise. I am a registered dietitian nutritionist and public health professional.
- The mission of the Division of Extension is to connect people with the University of Wisconsin. We teach, learn, lead and serve, transforming lives and communities. The Division of Extension's Health & Well-Being Institute engages with the people and communities of Wisconsin to build connections, facilitate learning, and catalyze evidence-informed strategies to support healthier lives for all. Our work addresses many of the state's most pressing well-being needs including food and nutrition security, chronic disease prevention, mental health promotion, substance use prevention, and access to health care.
- Extension's work reflects a variety of evidence-based strategies to promote change for individuals, families, and communities to help make the healthy choice, the easy choice. We:
 - Introduce children to new fruits and vegetables and teach them why they are important.
 - Teach caregivers how to buy, plan, and prepare healthy meals.
 - Engage families in support of choosing healthy diets while stretching food dollars.
 - And support communities in making healthy choices where people live, learn, work, play, and worship.
- The work we do is important because:

- 1 in 10 Wisconsinites live in census tracts that are low income and have low access to healthy food.
 - 1 in 10 Wisconsinites are food insecure.
 - 1 in 15 Wisconsin adults eat the recommended daily amount of fruits and vegetables.
 - Less than 1 in 2 high school students describe their health in general as excellent or very good.
 - And 1 in 2 youth get the recommended level of physical activity.
- Individuals with limited incomes and individuals from racial and ethnically diverse communities are disproportionately impacted by diet-related chronic diseases, such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. Obesity rates are also higher in rural areas compared to urban areas.
 - While the causes of obesity are complex and caused by many factors including eating patterns, physical activity levels, sleep routines, genetics, hormones, and certain medications – we also know that social and structural determinants of health, such as access to healthcare, healthy affordable food, and safe places for physical activity are important contributors to risk of diet-related disease.
 - In 2018, the Division of Extension received over \$2.5 million over five-years from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as part of the High Obesity Program or HOP. CDC's HOP program funds land grant universities like ours in mostly rural counties where more than 40% of adults have obesity.
 - With this funding, we worked in close partnership with community-based entities in the Menominee County/Nation to address some of the social and structural determinants that influence risk of diet related chronic disease. HOP helps residents get more access to healthy foods, have more opportunities to be physically active, and help prevent and reduce obesity in children and adults.
 - Some of our partners included the College of Menominee Nation, the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin, and Menominee County. We also worked closely with HeadStart, schools and other community-based organizations that support youth and their families.
 - Community partnerships, perspectives, and assets were central to the project – because we know that community context matters – and local solutions, informed by data, are critical to addressing complex issues.

- Moving forward, we will build from the successes of the *Kemamaceqtaq: We're All Moving* project as a continued recipient of HOP funds. Our successes included:
 - Strong connections and collaboration with partners
 - A focus on whole family and whole community and intergenerational approaches
 - A commitment to local knowledge and values and community engagement and
 - Bridging community values and culture alongside evidence-informed strategies to guide local solutions to increasing healthy food access and availability and opportunities to be physically active.

- In the next five years, we will work in both Menominee County/Nation and Ashland Counties to implement proven public health strategies to reduce chronic disease risk.

- Proven public health strategies to reduce chronic disease risk include:
 - Improving access to healthy foods in early care and education settings, schools, worksites, and community settings like food pantries and food banks.
 - Increasing the availability of culturally relevant foods in settings that procure, serve, and distribute food.
 - Improving the affordability and access to healthier foods through fruit and vegetable incentives and produce prescriptions.
 - Fruit and vegetable incentives are coupons or cash incentives that consumers can use when buying produce at a local farmers market or food retail location.
 - Produce prescriptions are prescriptions for fruits and vegetables to be used in a health care setting or in the patient's community.
 - Improving access to activity friendly routes to ensure that streets are accessible, pedestrians and bicyclists have safe routes, expanded public transit networks that are easy to access, and increasing access to parks and places where people can be physically active.
 - Increasing exposure and access to local produce, opportunities to learn about nutrition and agriculture, and hands-on learning in early care and education settings.

Thank you.

