**OBESITY IS THE NO. 1 CHILDREN’S HEALTH ISSUE, SAY ALASKANS**

Parents and other adults have many concerns about the health of Alaska’s children. Yet nearly two-thirds of adults spontaneously identified overweight, obesity, physical inactivity and poor nutrition as the most pressing children’s health issues.

**AN EPIDEMIC OF EPIC SIZE**

“...The impact of the obesity epidemic is reflected in a sobering national projection. Public health experts suggest, due to obesity, today’s children will be the first generation to live a shorter life than their parents.”

**ALASKAN’S CHOICE FOR TOP CHILDREN’S HEALTH ISSUE**

- The No. 1 children’s health issue identified by Alaska adults is obesity, or obesity risk factors such as poor diet and lack of physical activity.
- Behavioral health concerns include suicide; depression; and drug, alcohol, and tobacco abuse.
- Health care access concerns include the inability to find a doctor or specialist for a child or inability for a child to receive preventative services like hearing screens and vaccines.
- Chronic disease concerns such as diabetes, heart disease, and asthma.

**ALASKANS ARE RIGHT TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT OBESITY, PHYSICAL INACTIVITY & POOR NUTRITION**

- In three statewide surveys of specific populations of Alaska children, between 35% and 40% of 2- to 5-year-olds were classified as either overweight or obese.²,³,⁴
- Only 18% of Alaska high school students attended PE daily in an average week.⁵
- 49% of Alaska high school youth drank at least one sugar sweetened beverage every day.⁵
- For good health, students should be physically active for at least 60 minutes every day.⁶ Only 21% of Alaska high school students meet this criterion.⁵
- Nationally, one-third of obese preschool children and about half of obese school-age children become overweight adults.⁷
- Some medical conditions associated with obesity in adults have been diagnosed in obese children, including type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, fatty liver, sleep apnea, and musculoskeletal and psychosocial disorders.⁷

Source: Alaska BRFSS, 2010¹
Alaskan’s Opinions on Who is Responsible for Addressing Obesity

- In 2009, over 90% of Alaska adults said parents and individuals have some level of responsibility for addressing obesity.¹
- In addition, 80% of Alaska adults reported some responsibility lies with the schools, and 55% said the government has some or a lot of responsibility for addressing obesity.¹
- When asked how the government should address obesity, 79% of Alaska adults supported a government-funded obesity prevention media campaign.⁸

What Can Alaska Schools, Worksites & Communities Do?

- **Schools**: Restrict availability, portion size and marketing of less healthy food and beverages; provide all children with quality PE.
- **Worksites**: Provide programs for employees that improve diet and opportunities for physical activity.
- **Communities**: Establish community coalitions to promote environmental and policy change for active and healthy living.

What Can Health Care Providers Do?

- Assess all children for obesity risk, physical inactivity, and poor nutrition at least annually.
- Provide families with obesity prevention, physical activity and good nutrition messages.

What Can Individuals Do?

- Eat meals together as a family.
- Reduce consumption of soda and juices with added sugars.
- Eat more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins.
- Choose water and low-fat or non-fat dairy products.
- Limit television time to no more than two hours per day.
- Be more physically active.

What Can State Government Do?

- Help communities identify behaviors that increase the risk for obesity, physical inactivity and poor nutrition.
- Provide the public with education through a statewide media campaign to promote physical activity, good nutrition, and healthy weight.

References

2. Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Alaska Division of Public Health, Maternal and Child Health Epidemiology Unit. Alaska Childhood Understanding Behavior Survey (CIUBS). Personal Communication with Margaret Young on 8/31/11.