

News

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New state obesity prevention plan is announced this week

Raleigh—As nearly two thirds of North Carolina adults and a third of all youth struggle with obesity and overweight, a new state obesity plan released this week will help curb this major public health issue. Though recent studies show obesity rates may be leveling off across the nation, obesity remains one of the most pressing health issues in our state.

North Carolina's Plan to Address Obesity: Healthy Weight and Healthy Communities 2013-2020 will be released by Eat Smart, Move More North Carolina at 4:15 p.m. Thursday in the Crabtree Room at the State Health Director's Conference, Raleigh Marriott Crabtree Valley. Eat Smart, Move More North Carolina is a statewide movement that promotes increased opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity wherever people live, learn, earn, play and pray.

More than 325 health directors, public health professionals and partners are expected at the conference. The conference's theme, *Where Health Begins – Social Determinants*, fits with the plan's focus on the factors that play into many of the causes of poor eating habits and inactive lifestyles: a person's zip code.

"We need to help people make better choices in what they eat, and we can do this by making healthier choices available and easy to access," said Dr. Carolyn Dunn, professor, N.C. State University, N.C. Cooperative Extension and lead writer of the ESMNC obesity prevention plan. "People face nearly insurmountable challenges in making good decisions about what to eat and when and how to be physically active. "

"Often people's choices are driven by where they spend their time," Dunn said. "If healthy foods and drinks are available, people tend to choose those or at least have the option to make healthy choices. If the options are less than healthy, then people really have no choice."

The strategies in the plan are organized around eight community settings: health care, child care, schools, colleges and universities, work sites, faith-based and other community organizations, local governments, and businesses and industries. Each sector has a list of proven strategies that can be employed to help those who spend time in those settings make better eating and activity choices.

The strategies outlined in the plan, including access to fruits and vegetables and places to be active, come from the most reputable sources of what works to help people eat healthier food and get adequate physical activity.

"These proven strategies are responsible for the leveling off of obesity rates in some populations," said Dr. Vondell Clark, a pediatrician from Catawba County and vice-chair of the Eat Smart, Move More NC

Leadership Team. “Strategies such as enhancing workplaces to allow new mothers to breastfeed their infants and serving healthy food and large doses of physical activity in child care and schools make a difference because they affect the environment where so many children spend much of their time.”

The plan will be rolled out to the entire state over the course of the year with guidance to all Eat Smart, Move More NC partner organizations encouraging them to adopt strategies from the plan. The plan also includes ways to measure the state’s progress over time in both the making of healthier places, as well as improvements in individuals’ eating habits, physical activity, and body weight.

The Eat Smart, Move More NC team will release data from time to time on progress of these indicators to show how the state overall is faring in reaching its stated objectives.

“We will capture not only numbers, but success stories from our partners who will implement this plan,” said Dr. Dave Gardner, chair, Eat Smart, Move More NC. “We will be able to show how, over time, the strategies we implement will move us toward a healthier population.”

The release of the plan coincides with the airing of a docu-drama entitled *Health Crisis in Carolina: Real Families, Real Struggles, Real Solutions*. This reality-style TV show follows three families as they learn how the places where they live, learn, work, play and pray impact their ability to make healthy choices. *Health Crisis in Carolina: Real Families, Real Struggles, Real Solutions* airs on UNC-TV on Sunday, Feb. 3 at 1 p.m. Check local listings for dates and air times or visit UNC-TV online at www.UNCTV.org.

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For more information about the Eat Smart, Move More North Carolina Leadership Team, or to join the efforts, visit www.EatSmartMoveMoreNC.com. For more information on healthful eating and active lifestyles is also available at www.MyEatSmartMoveMore.com.