



ASSOCIATION OF STATE AND  
TERRITORIAL HEALTH OFFICIALS

## POSITION STATEMENT

### Obesity Prevention and Control

#### Position

Obesity is a serious national health problem that requires urgent attention from all levels of government. Population-based control of obesity involves encouraging healthy eating behaviors and regular physical activity. Both individual efforts and societal changes are necessary to stem the growing obesity epidemic.

- Federal, state, and local governments can provide the leadership necessary to prevent obesity. This effort will require increased and sustainable funding from all levels of government. The federal government can support and strengthen research addressing the prevention of obesity, including behavioral research and the study of community-based interventions. Additionally, the federal government should provide initial support for state nutrition and physical activity grant programs in every state, relevant surveillance efforts, and pilot projects within nutrition assistance, health promotion, and chronic disease prevention programs.
- Federal, state, and local governments can design pilot programs to support innovative obesity prevention practices. Ongoing evaluation of prevention programs is key.
- Federal, state, and local governments can use their influence as employers and serve as examples for obesity prevention in the workplace. All employers should be aware of the health consequences and the direct and indirect costs of obesity. Governments have the ability to communicate this information to private sector employers as well. Employers can provide healthy food options, worksite exercise facilities, and incentives to achieve a healthy body weight.
- State and local governments, public health agencies, schools, and community organizations can collaborate to develop and promote programs to prevent obesity through physical activity and proper nutrition. Youth-centered organizations can encourage healthy eating and physical activity. Communities can work to improve access to healthy foods through such efforts as encouraging the proliferation of supermarkets, farmers' markets, and gardens in low-income or underserved areas.
- State and local governments, private developers, and community groups can promote physical activity by increasing access to sidewalks, playgrounds, parks, bike paths, and safe streets and neighborhoods. Community groups and local governments can work together to increase capital improvement projects that promote physical activity.
- Health care professionals, professional associations, and health care payers can exercise their unique roles in the fight to prevent obesity. Professionals, such as physicians, nurses, and other clinicians, can track body mass index (BMI), offer evidence-based counseling, and provide leadership in community-based obesity prevention efforts. Insurers can provide incentives for individuals to maintain healthy

weight, and should include obesity preventive services in routine clinical practice— reimbursement for proven clinical preventive services is essential.

- Schools can provide an environment that encourages healthy eating and regular physical activity. State and local authorities can implement nutritional standards for all foods and beverages sold or served in schools, and can establish policies that promote a minimum of 30 minutes of physical activity for all children and adolescents during the school day.

### **Approval History**

*ASTHO Position Statements relate to specific issues that are time sensitive, narrowly defined, or are a further development or interpretation of ASTHO policy. Statements are developed and reviewed by appropriate Policy Committees and approved by the ASTHO Executive Committee. Position Statements are not voted on by the full ASTHO membership.*

*Prevention Policy Committee Review and Approval on November 18, 2005. Executive Committee Review and Approval on March 17, 2006. Policy Expires on March 17, 2009.*

*For further information about this Position Statement, please contact ASTHO Prevention Policy staff at [prevention@astho.org](mailto:prevention@astho.org). For ASTHO policies and additional publications related to the Position Statement, please visit [www.astho.org](http://www.astho.org).*

### **RELATED DOCUMENTS AND RESOURCES**

#### **ASTHO Documents:**

*Policy Statements:*

Prevention Policy Statement

*Position Statements:*

#### **Other ASTHO Publications:**

Moving Forward: Increasing Physical Activity in Youth

Data Collection in Schools: The Role of the State Health Department

#### **Other Resources**

[U.S. Surgeon General, A Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity](#)

[Institute of Medicine, Preventing Childhood Obesity: Health in the Balance](#)

[Guide to Community Preventive Services \(Community Guide\)](#)

[Washington State Department of Health, Nutrition and Physical Activity: A Policy Resource Guide](#)