



Doctors for Change 2019 Policy Priorities

Promoting Wellness to Combat Obesity in Texas

ABOUT DOCTORS FOR CHANGE

Doctors for Change is a member-based organization with over 1,500 participating health care providers, students, and medical residents throughout the Houston region. Our members, Board of Directors, and Leadership Team donate countless hours to make our organization run. The Board and Leadership team work closely with committees and our staff members to accomplish all of the work that we do. Doctors for Change works to increase access to care and improve the health of all Houstonians and all Texans through research, education, collaboration, and advocacy.

WHY OBESITY

Texas has a growing obesity crisis. One third of adult Texans were obese in 2017, up from 21.7% in 2000. In the 2016-17 school year, 18.5% of Texans age 10-17 were obese, the seventh highest rate in the nation. Obesity and being overweight contribute to diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, cancer, stroke, and maternal health problems. Obesity costs Texas billions of dollars every year in health care costs and decreased work productivity.

Why do we have such a problem with obesity in Texas? There are many reasons – a combination of genes and the environment; our children are consuming increased calories (eating in front of the TV, fast food, sugar-sweetened beverages, fewer fruits and vegetables) and have less activity (less time in school PE, concerns for neighborhood safety, and more TV and video games). We also lack health education and our culture does not always value a healthy lifestyle. What makes things worse in Texas is that almost 50% of our children are living at or near poverty, and we have > 1.3 million households (18.8%) that are food insecure. Poverty and food insecurity are directly linked to increased risk of obesity.

Can we reverse this trend? Absolutely. Other states are making progress (Mississippi, Georgia – to name a couple). And DFC believes that Texas can reverse this dangerous and costly trend by implementing evidence-based policy changes that do the following:

- Increase fresh fruits and vegetables
- Increase physical activity
- Increase breastfeeding initiation, duration, and exclusivity
- Decrease sugar sweetened beverages
- Decrease consumption of calorie dense, nutrient poor foods
- Decrease TV (screen) time



WE THEREFORE RECOMMEND:

- **Have districts develop a locally determined school recess policy and establish a state working group for best practice guidelines on recess**
- Implement comprehensive wellness reform in Texas schools including requiring health education and increasing the time requirements for physical education.
- **Reimburse health care providers for lifestyle/ obesity counseling**

Pertinent legislation:

- HB 455 (Allen): Relating to policies on the recess period in public schools. **Considered in Calendars on 3/13.**
- SB 364 (Watson): Relating to policies on the recess period in public schools. **Committee report printed and distributed.**
- SB 952 (Watson): Relating to standards for nutrition, physical activity, and screen time for certain child-care facilities and homes. **Committee report printed and distributed.**