



Surveillance Brief

Wisconsin's Comprehensive Cancer Control Program
Prevention • Screening & Detection • Treatment • Quality of Life • Palliative Care

December 2007
Volume 3 Number 6

PROMOTING A HEALTHIER LIFESTYLE THROUGH WORKSITE WELLNESS

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INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of obesity and overweight has grown at such an alarming rate over the past few decades that it has been termed an epidemic. In the past three decades, obesity in adults between 20 and 74 years of age has doubled from 15.0% to 32.9% (see Figures 1 and 2 for more information). In children, the prevalence of overweight has doubled in the 2-5 age group and nearly tripled in the 6-11 and 12-19 age groups.¹ Overweight and obesity have been linked to various chronic diseases, including several types of cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and stroke.

In order to promote the State of Wisconsin's efforts to deal with the obesity epidemic, several organizations including the Department of Health and Family Services created the Wisconsin Nutrition and Physical Activity State Program using a CDC funded five year cooperative agreement. By working with statewide partners to improve the health and well-being of the residents of Wisconsin, the program promotes healthy food and beverage choices, physical activity, and environments that support healthy behavior.

Wisconsin's Comprehensive Cancer Control Program (WCCCP) teamed up with the Wisconsin Nutrition and Physical Activity Program to improve Wisconsin lifestyles and reduce obesity and chronic diseases. Lifestyle factors such as nutrition and physical activity are of key importance because they contribute greatly to morbidity and mortality yet are modifiable.

The collaboration resulted in the Healthy Lifestyles project, which fosters partnerships between local nutrition and physical activity coalitions and

worksites. The project focused on a goal of the Wisconsin Nutrition and Physical Activity State Plan—creating environments that support healthy eating and being physically active in worksites. The WCCCP offered six Healthy Lifestyle grants. These six one-year grants provided local nutrition and physical activity coalitions with funds to implement healthy behavior changes within local worksites and to pilot the *Wisconsin Worksite Wellness Resource Kit*. Worksites were targeted in the hopes that a supportive environment would create long-term interest and activity leading to healthier lifestyles centered on improved nutrition and increased physical activity. The purpose of this brief is to promote awareness of the link between cancer and obesity and the effectiveness of cooperative initiatives such as the Healthy Lifestyles projects that use the worksite to catalyze implementation of healthier lifestyles.

Summary

Objective – To highlight the success of the recent Healthy Lifestyles worksite wellness projects in increasing physical activity and nutrition awareness at worksites.

Methods – Data and feedback were gathered from six coalitions developing worksite wellness projects.

Findings – Worksite wellness projects initiated significant policy and environmental changes to help workers live healthier lives. The majority of workers stated that their level of physical activity and consumption of nutritious foods increased. Because of these positive effects, coalitions expressed a desire to continue and expand their worksite wellness projects.

Implications – The worksite is an effective target for initiating activities that allow people to live healthier lives. Worksite wellness projects serve as a bridge for public health nutrition and physical activity coalitions to have an impact within the community.

METHODS

In 2006, six local nutrition and physical activity coalitions each received a \$4,000 grant from the WCCCP through a competitive request for proposal (RFP) process. Each coalition group worked with up to five local businesses to develop a worksite wellness program for the year. Although each community coalition tailored a program to its local business partners, each program was developed using the Wisconsin Worksite Wellness Resource Kit employing evidence-based strategies and action steps outlined in the WCCCP's Comprehensive Cancer Control Plan 2005 to 2010.² In the

resource kit, the procedure for developing a worksite wellness program was outlined in the following six steps:

1. Reasons to focus on worksite wellness
2. Developing leadership and garnering support
3. Assessing the worksite to develop appropriate programming
4. Programming for the worksite
5. Making decisions and developing an action plan
6. Evaluating the success of the program

Each worksite developed objectives and was asked to evaluate how well these objectives were met at the end of the year. Worksites were asked for their usage of various evaluation methods, programming that initiated policy changes, and programming that initiated environmental changes. The six coalitions also commented on the future of their worksite wellness programs, specifically whether or not the projects would be continued, expanded, or changed, and on the *Wisconsin Worksite Wellness Resource Kit*.

RESULTS

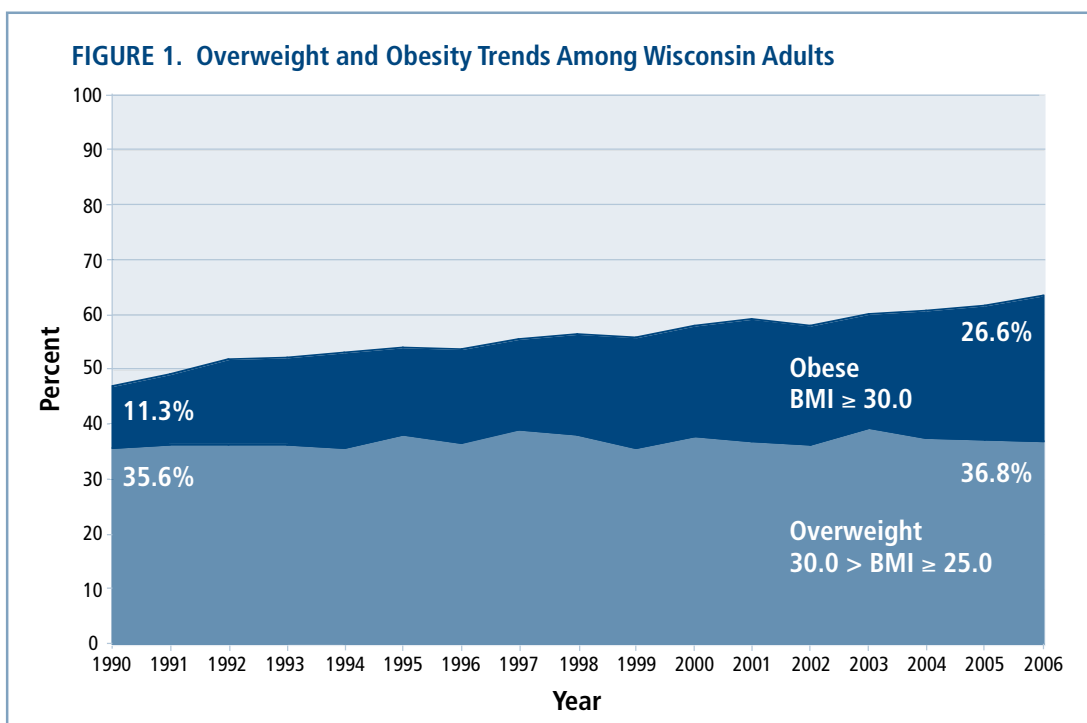
The evaluation methods that provided the most feedback and had the highest response rates were monthly progress updates from worksites, meeting minutes, participant attendance logs, pre- and post-surveys of participants, and documentation of policy and environmental changes.

The 16 worksites collectively made 27 policy changes. Four of 6 coalitions were able to initiate policy changes at their partner worksites. Two of 6 coalitions reported that the worksites formed comprehensive worksite wellness programs, developed more flexible scheduling to accommodate physical activity during the day, offered health club discounts or cash incentives, increased the cost of less nutritious foods, and adopted a written policy supporting breastfeeding in the workplace. Three of the 6 coalitions reported that worksites initiated health risk assessments or appraisals to motivate and make people more aware of their risk of chronic diseases and those that could be impacted by changes in their physical activity and diet. Four of 6 coalitions reported that worksites

were able to provide healthier foods and beverages at meetings, conferences, and catered events.

All 6 coalitions reported that their partner worksites were able to initiate environmental changes. The 16 worksites made a total of 45 environmental changes. One coalition reported that their partner worksite established a fitness facility nearby. Two of 6 coalitions reported that bike racks were provided, fruits and vegetables were offered, and a room for breastfeeding was designated. Three of 6 coalitions reported that worksites reduced competitive foods of low nutritional value, offered low-cost fruits and vegetables, and provided nutritional information on foods. Five of 6 coalitions reported that worksites provided nutrition education classes to employees and water throughout the day, established walking routes near the worksite, and displayed visual prompts to encourage physical activity. Four of 6 coalitions plan on continuing and expanding the project to include additional worksites.

For more results see “How To Tips: WI Worksites Provide Healthier Vending” at www.wicancer.org.



COMMENTS

All coalitions were able to initiate positive changes at their worksite. Many worksites took several steps to encourage breastfeeding at the workplace, such as designating a room for breastfeeding and creating an atmosphere of acceptance of breastfeeding at the workplace. Research has shown breastfed infants have a decreased risk of overweight and obesity later in life.² In addition, worksites were able to make their food choices healthier through changes in vending contracts and cafeteria offerings.

Worksites were also very successful in creating environments more conducive to physical activity. Programming ranged from the creation of a fitness center near the worksite to simply providing bike racks or information on walking routes near the worksite.

Most importantly, such programming resulted in measurable changes in the physical activity and nutrition awareness of workers. Coalitions documented increases in physical activity and healthy food intake. Such changes initiated at the worksite may be the first steps to a healthier lifestyle

as workers begin to practice exercise and healthy eating at home as well.

PROGRAM/POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The results of these pilot worksite wellness projects indicate that worksites are effective targets for initiating healthy lifestyle changes. Worksites provide a unique opportunity to initiate healthy lifestyle changes at the community level through the coalition-worksite partnership model. Coalitions requested additional information on how to provide assistance to worksites on the beginning stages of wellness program development. The Nutrition and Physical Activity Program and WCCCP will focus on improving future projects, specifically by guiding coalitions through the initial stages of development, the most difficult stage as evidenced by these pilot projects. Another series of worksite wellness projects funded by the National Governor's Association (NGA) have just concluded. The success of such programs will help to mitigate the prevalence of overweight and obesity, which also may decrease the risk of chronic diseases such as cancer.

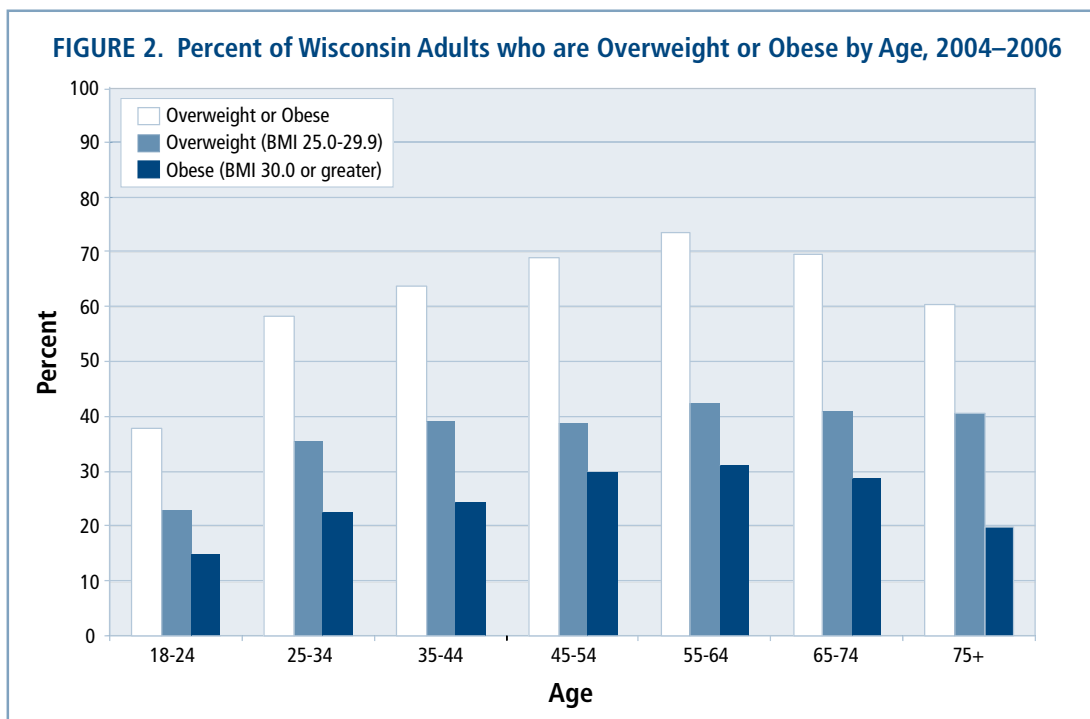
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Healthy People Wood
County Coalition
Fit City Madison
Sheboygan County Coalition for
Kids' Activity and Nutrition
Coulee Region Childhood
Obesity Coalition
Healthy Eating, Active
Living (HEAL) Coalition
of Marathon County
Burnett County Nutrition Coalition
Sheryl Scott

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Suggested Citation: Pesik, et al. Promoting a Healthier Lifestyle through Worksite Wellness. Surveillance Brief. UW Paul P. Carbone Comprehensive Cancer Center. 2007; 3-6.





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Layout and Design: Media Solutions

Funding is provided by The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, The Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, The Wisconsin Healthier Partnership Fund, and the UW Paul P. Carbone Comprehensive Cancer Center.

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