U.S. Conference of Mayors Awarded Grant to Help Reverse Childhood Obesity Epidemic

Funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation supports mayors in their efforts to increase opportunities for physical activity, healthy eating.

WASHINGTON—The U.S. Conference of Mayors today announced it has received a grant of $300,000 from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) to help communities increase children’s access to affordable healthy foods and opportunities for physical activity.

The grants were awarded through Leadership for Healthy Communities, an RWJF national program that assists state and local leaders in their efforts to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic. The associations were selected because their members are uniquely positioned to work across multiple levels of government and across intra-governmental agencies and departments to eliminate barriers to healthy eating and active living in schools and communities.

Today, more than 23.5 million children and adolescents in the United States—nearly one in three young people—are either obese or overweight, putting them at higher risk for serious, even life-threatening health problems. However, recent data shows that states and cities that have taken a comprehensive policy approach to preventing obesity are beginning to see declines in obesity rates among children.

“Policy changes that make it easier for kids and families to eat healthier foods and be active are helping to improve the health of our nation’s children, families and communities,” said Maya Rockeymoore, director of Leadership for Healthy Communities. “We are proud to work with policy-maker associations whose creativity and commitment are helping to build national momentum around this issue.”

This grant will support and enhance the work of the U.S. Conference of Mayors Food Policy Task Force under the leadership of its chair Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino and vice-chair Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake. The task force will work to increase access to high-quality, affordable healthy foods in cities and help expand the number of mayors with established citywide food access strategies.

“The U.S. Conference of Mayors looks forward to helping increase the availability of healthy, locally grown food in our cities. The only way to create strong, healthy communities is to make healthy foods easily available to everyone,” said Conference President Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter. “Here in Philadelphia, we have seen what improving access to healthy foods can do for our children. A recent study has shown that we have successfully decreased the rate of childhood obesity in my city by 5 percent, so I know firsthand how important this work is. We thank the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for this grant and look forward to continuing to improve the health of our citizens, especially our children.”

The U.S. Conference of Mayors will be joining five other national policy-maker associations in working with Leadership for Healthy Communities on this initiative, including the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), Local Government Commission (LGC), National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), and Women in Government (WIG).

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Specifically, the six organizations will focus on one or more of the following priorities:

- improving the nutritional quality of snack foods and beverages in schools;
- reducing consumption of sugary beverages;
- protecting children from unhealthy food and beverage marketing;
- increasing access to affordable healthy foods;
- increasing access to parks, playgrounds, walking paths, bike lanes and other opportunities to be physically active; and
- helping schools and youth-serving programs increase children’s physical activity levels.

“Policy-makers want to help children and families lead healthier lives,” said Dwayne C. Proctor, director of RWJF’s childhood obesity team. “Leadership for Healthy Communities harnesses that energy by providing information and resources to help state and local leaders understand which approaches have the greatest potential for success.”

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**The U.S. Conference of Mayors** is the official nonpartisan organization of cities with populations of 30,000 or more. There are 1,295 such cities in the country today, and each city is represented in the Conference by its chief elected official, the mayor. Like us on Facebook at facebook.com/usmayors, or follow us on Twitter at twitter.com/usmayors.

**Leadership for Healthy Communities** is a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation designed to support local and state government leaders nationwide in their efforts to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic through public policies that promote active living, healthy eating and access to healthy foods. For more information, visit www.leadershipforhealthycommunities.org.

**The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation** focuses on the pressing health and health care issues facing our country. As the nation’s largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to improving the health and health care of all Americans, the Foundation works with a diverse group of organizations and individuals to identify solutions and achieve comprehensive, measurable, and timely change. In 2007, the Foundation committed $500 million toward its goal of reversing the childhood obesity epidemic by 2015. This is the largest commitment any foundation has made to the issue. For 40 years the Foundation has brought experience, commitment, and a rigorous, balanced approach to the problems that affect the health and health care of those it serves. When it comes to helping Americans lead healthier lives and get the care they need, the Foundation expects to make a difference in your lifetime. For more information, visit www.rwjf.org. Follow the Foundation on Twitter or Facebook.