



CHILDCARE CENTERS KEY TO HEALTHY START: PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP TO ENCOURAGE BETTER NUTRITION AND INCREASED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN EARLY CARE AND LEARNING CENTERS

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), one of every eight preschoolers is obese. Obese preschoolers are five times as likely to be overweight or obese as adults.

While obesity rates in 19 states have declined, Ohio's have not and threaten to become worse.

Recognizing that this is the first generation of children that may have a shorter life expectancy than their parents, The Mt. Sinai Health Care Foundation, a longtime supporter of early childhood obesity prevention efforts, felt compelled to take action.

Mt. Sinai recently awarded \$150,000 over a three-year period to the Cuyahoga County Board of Health to act as the coordinating agency to develop an early childhood health and wellness plan for Cuyahoga County to improve nutrition and increase physical activity in children up to five years of age. The work will involve community partners through a task force of the Invest in Children Goal 2 Safe and Healthy Kids Committee and will engage the outreach and expertise of Starting Point, the local child care resource and referral agency.

Through collaboration with local childcare centers, staff will be trained using established best practices with the intent of producing healthier children, better-informed parents and improved health outcomes for all.

A key operational component will be the implementation of the Healthy Children Healthy Weight program, a designated Ohio Healthy Program that is being promoted statewide by the Ohio Department of Health. Healthy Children Healthy Weight promotes collaboration with early learning centers to develop strategies, policies and environments that encourage healthy weight and lifestyles for children.

With the support provided by Mt. Sinai, Cuyahoga County Board of Health plans on providing technical assistance and training to at least 24 centers to increase center staff knowledge and skills encouraging healthy habits in young children. Centers will be encouraged to create sustainable environmental changes by implementing policies that support healthy nutrition and physical activity. In addition, technical assistance will facilitate improvement in nutritional quality and variety of meals and snacks. The program also encourages parent and staff engagement.

Work began in March 2014 and will continue through February 2017.

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