

Riley Wiseman, Meghana Totapally, John Parks, Varrick Bippus
Honors Global Obesity Epidemic
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Proposal

One facet to solving obesity is through focusing on food availability. Examples of this include increasing the means of SNAP vouchers and reducing unhealthy food options for minors. One way to increase the value of SNAP vouchers is by implementing federal “Double Up Food Bucks” programs, where SNAP vouchers are used to purchase fresh produce which could be used at grocery stores or farmers markets. Though this specific program already exists in Michigan and matches the amount spent on produce to up to \$20 a day, it currently does not include produce purchased at larger grocery stores, such as Walmart or Kroger. This program increases fresh and healthy options for families that may not be able to afford healthier meals at home. Another way to incentivize healthier meals for families that cannot necessarily afford them, but are located in more rural areas is to allow SNAP vouchers to be used through meal kit delivery services, such as Hello Fresh. Where rural areas may not have fresh produce available at grocery stores, a delivery system can be set up to still provide healthier options in places that suffer from food deserts. In order to create a more efficient system and reduce transportation costs, hubs could be built in rural zones in order to store these meal kits for families to pick up later. Reducing the availability of unhealthy food is also important in solving obesity, specifically in children. By enacting a prohibition of soda for anyone under 18 years old, children will be much less likely to become normalized to drinking soda, which has very few, if any, health benefits. The goal is that drinking soda becomes stigmatized within younger generations and becomes unsavory. This will not stop all children from drinking soda, but it will have a positive impact in decreasing the amount of soda consumed, which will help to solve the obesity epidemic. Another proposition is to eliminate kid’s meal advertising as well as getting rid of toys that come with kid’s meals. This will reduce the amount of children that pressure their parents into getting them fast food to eat, and hopefully, make kids become more likely to seek out healthier options given that they won’t be missing out on a toy that comes with an unhealthy meal.

Reducing the obesity epidemic that plagues our nation doesn't start with reducing the obesity percentages of adults, it starts with reducing obesity of children. Then by reducing the prevalence of obesity in children it will help reduce the percent of obese adults in our country. It has been shown in Finland schools that providing nurses that meet with children about their health helps children become healthier. By having yearly checks with the school nurse or doctor children within the school are more accepting of their peers who are overweight. These checks can also help diagnose problems before they become something that can not be fixed. Implementing nurses into our schools can reduce the prevalence of obesity throughout children in the country. Preventing obesity in children and preventing them from forming bad habits that lead to obesity will ultimately lead to less obesity throughout the nation.

Another way to prevent obesity among children would be to increase nutrition education in schools and extracurricular activities. This can be done through school gardens and youth urban farming practices. It should be required that schools have federally funded gardens from which students can learn from. Along with that, a curriculum centered around nutrition should be established in all schools. A benefit of the school garden is that healthier food will be added to the diet of the students. The vegetables and fruits grown in the garden by the children will be used in the school lunches. That way, the school lunches will be healthier and less costly to make as most of the produce will come directly from the school garden. Additionally, simultaneous nutrition and agricultural education about how to properly grow fruits and vegetables and the nutritional content of the produce will aid in developing the student's sense of eating healthy. Larger scale farmers can also receive compensation to personally teach the children about proper agricultural practices and have them visit their farms. There are many examples of schools that currently have these school garden programs in the US. One such example is the Magdalena Municipal Schools in New Mexico.¹ All age ranges of students manage the garden there, and the vegetables and fruits that they grow are used in their own salad bar in the school cafeteria.¹ Culinary arts students of the school make other dishes out of the produce.¹ Urban farming, or farming done in urban areas, greatly increases the availability of fresh and healthy food in urban areas. Teaching urban farming to children as an extracurricular activity can also increase nutrition education among children and aid in their development of healthy eating habits. Currently, an urban farm called Harlem Grown in New York offers camps for children to learn about gardening and cooking.² Through those camps, children started to eat healthier and even started to question why grocery stores and convenience stores in urban areas do not have healthier food options.² Some hurdles to establishing school gardens and youth urban farming practices are the constant need for time, money, and other resources. However, school gardens and urban farms are made to take up very less space. Vegetables like potatoes and fruits like oranges can be grown indoors and require limited space. Making practices such as school gardens and youth urban farming more prevalent in the US will help children develop healthier habits and will eventually lead to a decrease in obesity in their futures.

The weight-loss journey is not as easy as some people may think, it comes with many mental and physical challenges. So to truly help reduce the obesity epidemic, providing mental health support for people is necessary. We propose creating a government run program that creates groups for people to go and feel the support of other people going through the same journey. These gatherings can provide healthy food options, exercise sessions, tips to improve mental health, and anything else that someone needs while trying to lose weight. By providing help through the form of therapy groups it may ease the stress that comes with losing weight. This proposed program is similar to Alcoholics Anonymous which has been shown to be more effective than other interventions. It has shown that social interaction within these groups helps people achieve abstinence because people are able to share what works for them and learn from other people. Having other people with the same goals of losing weight will create a positive environment that helps everyone reach their goals.

So far, our plan for reducing global rates of obesity has focused on two main ideas: increasing availability of healthy foods while decreasing availability of unhealthy foods, and educating the public on all aspects of obesity, healthy eating, and a healthy lifestyle. Eating a healthy diet is one of the most important things a person can do to improve their own health, but also important to good health is getting adequate physical activity. According to the CDC, only 53.3% of U.S. adults over the age of 18 get adequate aerobic exercise, and even less get adequate aerobic and muscle strengthening exercise, at about 23.2% (CDC.gov). Therefore, in order to combat the issue of global obesity it is essential that efforts be taken by the government to promote and increase the prevalence of physical activity in the country and its citizens. We plan to do this by building the country's infrastructure: in cities and rural towns across the country, the government will install more bike lanes, sidewalks, public parks, publicly accessible and free exercise equipment, and anything else that promotes and increases ease of access for physical activity. Installing more bike lanes in cities will increase the number of people who decide to take a bike for their daily commute, and this is a big step in increasing a person's daily physical activity. However, not everybody has a bike or enjoys riding one, so this doesn't wholly solve the problem. Sidewalks are another form of infrastructure that help promote physical activity for citizens by providing a safe walkable path beside the road. In very rural areas of the country there is often a lack of sidewalks, and rural areas also often suffer from increased rates of obesity. Building more sidewalks in rural areas to allow for more walking commutes provides a form of physical activity that is not strenuous yet simultaneously very beneficial for one's health. The government will also install more public parks and playgrounds in an effort to promote physical activity. This is helpful because it targets the youth, which is very important in our plan to reduce global obesity. Again, the government should focus especially on installing new parks in rural areas in which there is a dearth of such facilities. By increasing the amount of public facilities that facilitate physical activity for citizens, global obesity rates will decrease over time.

Related to bolstering the nation's infrastructure, the government also needs to take action to reduce the negative impact of "food deserts" on communities in the country. A food desert is an area that does not contain adequate, or even any, grocery stores and food vendors that offer healthy food options. People living in food deserts suffer greatly from reduced availability of healthy food options because their only choice is to purchase food from places like gas stations and smaller convenience stores, which offer a large variety of unhealthy foods. The main issue at play is that people living in food deserts have to travel unrealistic distances to acquire healthy food. So to solve this, the government will issue a geographical and population based zoning policy with a twofold objective: to install grocery stores in every created "zone" so that all citizens have equal access to healthy food, and to set a limit on the number of unhealthy food vendors in each zone to decrease access to unhealthy foods. Zones, much like counties, will be based on population to ensure that there are enough grocery stores to meet the food requirements of all citizens in a zone. These zones also need to take into account geography to make sure that no citizen lives too far from a grocery store.

By increasing the availability of healthy foods, decreasing the availability of unhealthy foods, promoting nutrition and obesity/health education in the youth, and promoting physical activity the global obesity rates will eventually decrease. While these initiatives mostly place the burden of responsibility on the government to take action and change policy/infrastructure, the issue of reducing obesity is a task that requires every citizen to change things about their lifestyle. For those who are already obese, the journey of losing weight can take a large toll on one's mental health, so it is important that community programs to facilitate community and discussion around weight loss and mental health are put in place. It is still up to citizens, though, to attend these programs and improve the conversations that are being had about obesity and related mental health. Ultimately, it will take action on the part of the government and the people to decrease global obesity. People can't be forced to do anything, only encouraged or discouraged, so government bans and programs can only do so much. The government needs to make it as easy and appealing as possible for citizens to adopt healthier lifestyles so that people can take initiative and improve their health, ultimately improving the health of the world and reducing global obesity.

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2. Nierenberg A. Urban-farming camps have kids asking, where's the healthy food? New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/30/dining/urban-farming-kids-healthy-food-new-york-city.html>. Updated 2019. Accessed Nov 23, 2022.

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