

Weighing the Costs of Obesity in Tennessee



Tennessee consistently ranks as one of the most obese states. Like most Americans, Tennesseans are consuming more calories, failing to engage in adequate physical activity, and living in a society with historically cheap food and employment that is more sedentary than the agricultural-based work of past centuries.

Obesity is closely associated with several serious chronic diseases and numerous health conditions, including certain cancers, heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. Confronted with the obesity epidemic and its health and fiscal toll, the public, private, and nonprofit sectors have responded with a profusion of anti-obesity initiatives and wellness campaigns. In Tennessee, such initiatives increased significantly over the past five years, operating in a variety of settings, from schools to workplaces to churches to local health departments.

Report Findings:

- Tennessee lacks a comprehensive strategic plan to reduce obesity rates and evaluate progress
- The absence of detailed, specific data on obesity complicates trend identification and hampers evaluation
- State employee health and wellness incentives are underdeveloped
- Physical education has declined over the past decade
- Schools lack a state-level contact for physical education
- Coordinated School Health Programs reach only a small percentage of students statewide
- Tennessee schools and farms could benefit from the expansion of farm-to-school programs
- The state does not require school food service directors to obtain credentialing or certification in nutrition

Tennessee's high rate of obesity incurs a high price - Direct medical costs associated with obesity in Tennessee totaled \$1.84 billion in 2003.

Recommendations:

- Develop a strategic plan to prevent and reduce obesity in Tennessee
- Increase the quantity and quality of obesity data collected throughout the state
- Enhance incentives and develop new programs for state employees to lose weight or maintain a healthy weight
- Require more physical activity in schools
- Create a school physical education consultant at the state level
- Expand the number of Coordinated School Health Program sites
- Explore the expansion and formalization of farm-to-school programs
- Require that school food service directors obtain credentialing or certification in nutrition

View the full report at <http://www.comptroller.state.tn.us/cpdivorea.htm>

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