



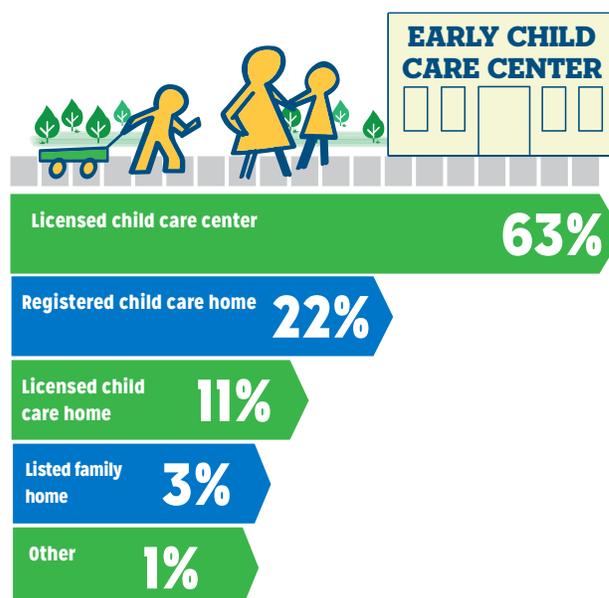
# HEALTHY LIVING MATTERS

## ASSESSMENT OF EARLY CHILDCARE NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY ENVIRONMENTS

### ASSESSING ACTIVE LIVING AND HEALTHY EATING PRACTICES AND POLICIES IN EARLY CHILD CARE

Healthy Living Matters (HLM) is working to prevent childhood obesity in Harris County, through policy and environmental change. HLM examined the challenges faced by early child care providers when providing healthy nutrition and physical activity opportunities to children in their care. Four hundred and twenty-six licensed and registered child care providers responded to the Healthy Living Matters: A Harris County Early Child Care Survey. The results of this survey have helped HLM to develop policy recommendations that can help shape healthy environments for our youngest Harris County children.

In addition to the survey, HLM conducted focus groups with thirty child care home providers in order to learn about their views on the importance of nutrition and physical activity, their perceived role, and the information and training needed to provide a healthier environment for children in their care. The findings from the focus groups suggests that providers need assistance with implementing healthier eating and physical activity opportunities in their facilities.



### BREAKDOWN OF EARLY CHILDCARE RESPONDENTS SURVEYED

## Key Survey Findings

- ➔ Child care home respondents reported offering more fruits and vegetables to children in their care than respondents from child care centers.
- ➔ Child care center respondents reported offering sweets/fatty/salty foods at a higher rate than they are offering fruits and vegetables.
- ➔ The majority of child care providers reported making water readily available and refraining from offering sugary drinks to children.
- ➔ Thirty-nine percent of child care providers reported offering 60 minutes of free play and 28.6% offered 60 minutes of structured play at least once per day
- ➔ Respondents reported that physical activity training opportunities are rarely offered to teachers or staff.
- ➔ The focus groups found that providers need assistance with implementing healthier eating and physical activity opportunities in their facilities.



## Barriers Preventing Healthy Eating and Adequate Physical Activity

- ➔ Lack of support from parents/families
- ➔ Insufficient funds or lack of resources
- ➔ Limited time teaching nutrition
- ➔ Potential waste from uneaten food (picky eaters)
- ➔ Food allergies and sensitivities
- ➔ Lack of teacher or staff training on physical education
- ➔ Weather and insects requiring time to apply sunscreen and insect repellent

# STAKEHOLDERS RECOMMENDED THESE POLICIES FOR EARLY CHILD CARE PROVIDERS AND ADVOCATES

## EAT

Standardize nutrition requirements across all levels of childcare, including currently unregulated care facilities

Adopt nutrition standards for all child care facilities that are consistent with the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

Develop minimum requirements or policies around what are acceptable levels of sweets or high fat, high salt foods that can be offered by providers.

Require providers to limit beverages (other than water) to 100% juice or 1% or fat-free milk only.

Establish healthy food guidelines for celebrations that occur in child care facilities (i.e. treats for birthdays, rewards for successful grades, etc.).



Limit fundraisers to non-food items such as coupon books or magazines rather than candy, baked goods, etc.

Develop recommendations around what parents should send as meals and snacks for their children.

## PLAY

Require child care facilities to have a written policy on nutrition and physical activity standards that are read and understood by staff members as well as caretakers of children attending the facility.



Develop guidelines to educate and incent child care providers to eat healthy and be physically fit as role models for children.

Advocate for legislation to prohibit TV/video, computer, or video games for children under the age of two years at licensed and registered childcare facilities.

## LEARN

Provide educational materials to parents or caregivers on the importance of nutrition and physical activity in early childhood.

Make parents or caregivers aware of any nutrition or physical activity training that is available or offered to the staff, so that they have the option of participating as well.

Encourage state legislators to propose funding for childhood health promotion grants/programs.

Include staff training on healthy eating and nutrition a state requirement as part of certification for providers.

# HEALTHY LIVING MATTERS COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN

**GLOBAL POLICY ON CHILDHOOD OBESITY—G1. Advocate for Texas legislators to develop a statewide strategic plan to address hunger, nutrition, physical activity and obesity in children and families.**

**EAT: The following policy strategies are endorsed by HLM to support access to, and age-appropriate serving sizes of, healthy foods for all children in Harris County.**

- E1.** Support legislation and policies at the state level that incent the purchase of healthy foods with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) dollars.
- E2.** Advocate for the development and passage of a state law to create a grocery/food\* store loan program to address the problem of food deserts. (\*Not limited to grocery stores, may include local grocers, convenience stores, etc.)
- E3.** Support development and adoption of local laws to promote breastfeeding in Harris County, including recognizing designated breastfeeding-friendly hospitals, legally protecting breastfeeding mothers from harassment in public and while at work, and ensuring mothers are guaranteed a *Mothers' Bill of Rights*.
- E4.** Encourage use of available public lands in Harris County for the development of community gardens and farmers markets.
- E5.** Encourage school districts and appropriate public programs to increase awareness and promotion of school food options for low-income students during the summer.
- E6.** Advocate for low-fat, low-calorie drinks in schools and childcare facilities.

**PLAY: The following policy strategies are endorsed by HLM to promote opportunities for safe, adequate, and appropriate physical activity for all children in Harris County.**

- P1.** Support the development and adoption of "Safe Neighborhoods" Policy:
  - Eradicate abandoned houses;
  - Ensure sufficient public safety officer coverage, encourage community policing approaches;
  - Improve animal control efforts to reduce stray animals;
  - Fix streets and sidewalks, promote Safe Routes to Schools efforts, build sidewalks in new developments, promote Complete Streets policy;
  - Improve lighting in streets and parks; and
  - Support the ongoing development of safe trails and parks, such as the Bayou Greenway Initiative and Utility Corridor Improvements.
- P2.** Support Harris County School Health Advisory Councils (SHACs) in implementing a policy that requires physical activity (PA) subcommittees and recommendations for joint-use agreements or community/school partnerships.
- P3.** Increase middle school physical education (PE) requirements to include moderate to vigorous activity for 6 semesters, high school PE requirements to 1.5 semesters, and make 1 semester of health education required for graduation.
- P4.** Institute a Texas policy on recess that encourages age-appropriate outdoor playtime.
- P5.** Conduct a study and encourage the Texas Education Agency to establish guidelines for outdoor features on public school campuses to maximize outdoor physical activity.

**LEARN: The following policy strategies are endorsed by HLM to promote health education opportunities related to nutrition, physical education, and general healthy living for all children, families and caregivers in Harris County.**

- L1.** HLM recommends the development of guidelines to educate and incent administrators, school teachers, childcare providers, and other staff to eat healthy and be physically fit as role models for children.
- L2.** Support a comprehensive "Community Health Literacy" strategy:
  - Support a campaign for healthy eating for families;
  - Expand community education programs on how to cook healthy;
  - Expand public programs that teach community and backyard gardening; and
  - Support a policy to expand coordinated school health strategies to grades 9-12.
- L3.** Establish state, city, and/or county healthy schools and healthy child care recognition programs with a training component.
- L4.** Promote outdoor classrooms and incorporate active learning into core curriculum subjects to increase physical activity in Harris County school districts.

**For resources, full citations, and more information, please visit [HealthyLivingMatters.net](http://HealthyLivingMatters.net).**