



# Strategies for Improving Food & Physical Activity Environments in San Mateo County



**Get** Healthy  
*San Mateo County*

Spring 2010  
[www.gethealthysmc.org](http://www.gethealthysmc.org)



## Dear Colleagues and Community Partners:

We are thrilled to present San Mateo County's strategies for improving food and physical activity environments to make the healthy option the easiest option for all. This document reaffirms our commitment to preventing childhood obesity and builds upon the *Prevention of Childhood Obesity Blueprint* adopted five years ago.

The strategies detailed in the following pages were developed with the input of San Mateo County civic and community leaders, national experts, and especially, Get Healthy San Mateo County Task Force members ([www.gethealthysmc.org](http://www.gethealthysmc.org)).

We are confident that our work together can continue to build a San Mateo County where:

- Every child can walk or bike to school and eat something he/she has grown
- Streets can be crossed safely by children and by older adults
- Healthy food is the easiest and cheapest food to purchase, and soda and junk food are expensive and hard to find
- All neighborhoods have parks, and all parks are safe and inviting
- Where you live doesn't determine how long you live, or how sick you become

Some of these strategies will require significantly more work than others, and we must not shy away from those that are the most challenging: opening new grocery stores, making unhealthy foods more expensive, widening our sidewalks and reducing neighborhood crime, building and maintaining parks, and many others. We will do our best to support this long-term work by summarizing promising models, connecting the dots across agencies, and detailing action steps in a series of Take Action documents. The first of these is *Building Health into San Mateo County Cities: Resources and Case Studies*, available at [www.gethealthysmc.org](http://www.gethealthysmc.org).

We thank you for your continued commitment to this work. We look forward to working with you to further improve physical activity and food environments in San Mateo County.

Sincerely,



**Jean S. Fraser**  
Chief  
San Mateo County Health System



**Scott Morrow, MD, MPH, MBA**  
Health Officer  
San Mateo County Health System

## BACKGROUND

2010 marks five years since the Get Healthy San Mateo County (GHSMC) Task Force first began addressing childhood obesity by focusing on prevention and health equity. In 2004, the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors, under the leadership of Supervisor Rose Jacobs Gibson, established *Healthy Communities: A Community Health Improvement Initiative to Eliminate Health Disparities*. The GHSMC Task Force was established out of this initiative; and the task force developed the *Blueprint for Prevention of Childhood Obesity: A Call To Action*. The blueprint has guided our collective work to maintain and improve the health of children in San Mateo County.

### Progress

Since its inception, the work of the GHSMC Task Force has been very fruitful. Approximately 300 people have attended one or more task force meetings; and nine working committees have implemented components of the blueprint. The blueprint puts forth aggressive objectives, and to date, 93% of the objectives are completed or underway. Considerable progress continues to be made in this area, but the task force acknowledges that significant learnings, the initial five-year timeline of the blueprint and a growing national movement to build healthy communities make this the opportune time to update San Mateo County's objectives for improving the environments that shape the everyday nutrition and physical activity, and the resulting health, of our children.

### Update Process

In the late part of 2009 and early 2010, partners throughout San Mateo County, including community-based organizations, healthcare providers, city staff and city parks and recreation department staff, County agencies, schools, after-school programs, childcare providers, and community leaders identified priorities and objectives for improving the environments that shape everyday nutrition and physical activity. These partners provided input at interactive meetings held throughout the county. Participants included more than 150 active GHSMC Task Force members, previous task force members and new organizational leaders.

The objectives detailed in this document were developed based on this input, as well as a review of local and national model practices, GHSMC Task Force learnings to date, and task force evaluation recommendations. Following the release of this document, an evaluation committee will match data and objectives to measure progress made on improving the health of San Mateo County.

# Framework for Implementation: Prevention and Health Equity

## FRAMEWORK FOR IMPLEMENTATION: PREVENTION AND HEALTH EQUITY

There is growing recognition across San Mateo County that where we live, work and go to school profoundly shapes our health and quality of life. Implementation of the Get Healthy San Mateo County strategies for improving food and physical activity environments must focus on environments, using primary prevention, so that people don't get sick in the first place. It must also prioritize changes in those places that have the least opportunities for physical activity and the fewest healthy food options by building health equity.

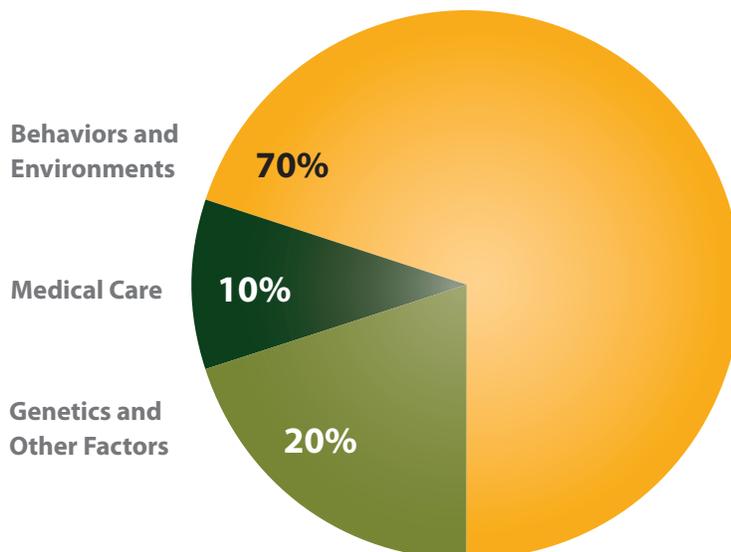
**Primary Prevention** is a systematic process that promotes healthy environments and behaviors, and reduces the likelihood of an illness or injury occurring. Primary prevention addresses the root causes of poor health, and takes action to prevent problems from occurring in the first place.

**Health Inequities** are differences in health that are not only unnecessary and avoidable, but also unfair and unjust. Health inequity identifies the common threads between the communities and populations that are most frequently getting sick. People working toward health equity seek to eliminate these common threads.

### Engaging in Primary Prevention

Neighborhoods encourage people to be active by providing access to parks, recreation centers and playgrounds, and by maintaining streets that are safe to pedestrians and bicyclists; or they discourage physical activity through busy roads, a lack of parks, unsafe streets and a high incidence of crime. They shape what we eat through easy access to affordable, healthy foods through grocery stores, neighborhood stores and farmers markets, or through an overabundance of liquor stores and fast food outlets.

The diseases resulting from childhood overweight and obesity can be treated, but not cured. San Mateo County's focus on prevention involves changing the environments where we live to make the healthy option the easy option.



Concepts excerpted from Prevention Institute's *Health Equity and Prevention Primer*, and *The Public Health Approach to Eliminating Disparities in Health* by David Satcher.

### Engaging in prevention recognizes that:

- **A focus on individual behavior is insufficient.** We need to change the social and physical environments where people live to make healthy eating and active living the easy option
- **We must increase collaboration across health issues** because the prevention strategies for many diseases and poor health outcomes are often the same
- **Prevention takes place outside of the healthcare realm**, in economic development, urban planning, education systems and transportation planning
- **Changing environments requires long-term engagement between new partners**, such as local and regional planners, traffic engineers, zoning administrators, school officials, and transportation planners
- **Youth are capable and important decision makers across our communities;** and involving them in the development of strategies and decisions impacting them can yield long-term rewards

### Building Health Equity

In San Mateo County, as in much of the United States, the neighborhoods where people live determine life span and overall health. Neighborhoods where low-income residents live are disproportionately void of opportunities for everyday physical activity and healthful foods. Children are not able to be outside, and easily accessible, affordable foods tend to be calorie-rich and nutrient-poor, purchased at fast food outlets and corner convenience stores. Wealthier people are able to live in neighborhoods with safe streets that promote walking and easy access to multiple grocery stores, downtown destinations and neighborhood parks and recreation centers. As a result of these differing environments, low-income children have much higher rates of obesity than their wealthier counterparts. In addition, because people of color are disproportionately low-income and have little to no choice but to live in these unhealthy neighborhoods, low-income people of color—primarily African Americans, Latinos and Pacific Islanders—have the highest rates of obesity and preventable health issues in San Mateo County.

To reverse these trends and build health equity, we must focus our prevention efforts in the areas where the fewest opportunities for health exist.

### Building health equity requires:

- **Addressing discrimination**, which maintains an uneven distribution of opportunity
- **Addressing crime on neighborhood streets, parks and gathering places** so that everyday physical activity is truly feasible
- **Prioritizing neighborhood cohesion and opportunities** for local business development as viable economic development
- **Recognizing that norms around physical activity and healthy eating** are deeply rooted in social environments and cultural expression; and that accessibility of information depends on language access. Programs cannot take a one-size-fits-all approach to intervention.
- **Seeking out funding opportunities** to increase local communities' capacities to develop and advocate for their own strategies for change. This requires a funding model that prioritizes innovation, allows for trial and error, and lasts long term.

## THE FIGURES ARE ASTONISHING

Chronic diseases and other preventable health issues in the United States have increased significantly over the last three decades. The same trend exists in San Mateo County:

- Today, more than 50% of adults and 25% of all children are overweight or obese.<sup>1</sup>
- In just one decade the percentage of adults with diabetes has doubled.<sup>2</sup>
- Heart disease accounts for 25% of all deaths.<sup>3</sup>

### Physical Activity

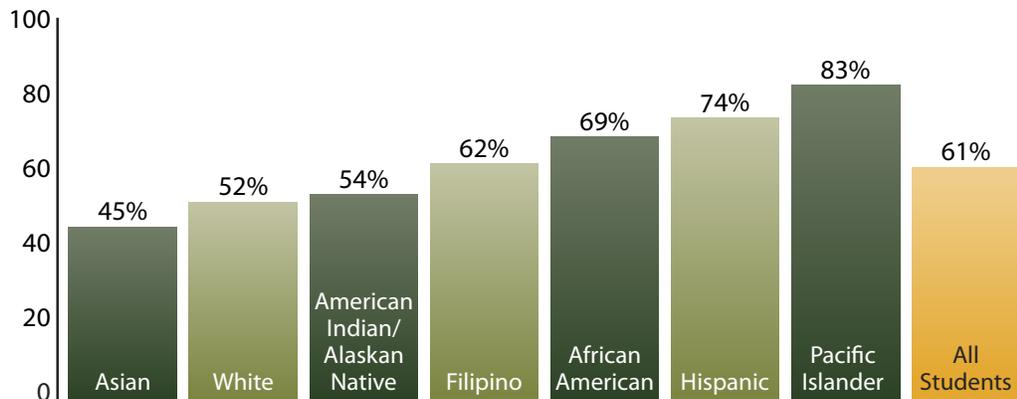
Regular physical activity, through recreation as transportation, can prevent many chronic diseases and contribute to good physical and mental health.

In San Mateo County:

- More than half (54%) of residents do not engage in regular physical activity.<sup>4</sup>
- Only 2% of Baby Boomers walk to complete errands or meet their daily non-commute needs.<sup>5</sup>

### Students Not Passing All Physical Fitness Standards by Ethnicity

San Mateo County 5th, 7th and 9th graders, 2008–2009 school year.<sup>6</sup>



### Food Environment

Access to healthy food is a strong contributor to good mental and physical health. Conversely, an overabundance of unhealthy foods contributes to rising rates of chronic diseases. The Retail Food Environment Index (RFEI) is a ratio of fast food and counter service outlets to outlets where fruits and vegetables are readily available. Below are a few sample RFEI ratios:<sup>7</sup>

- In the city of San Mateo, there are more than three unhealthy food outlets for every healthy outlet
- In Daly City, there are nearly five unhealthy food outlets for every healthy food outlet
- In Redwood City, there are nearly seven unhealthy food outlets for every healthy food outlet

#### DATA SOURCES

<sup>1</sup> 2007 California Health Interview Survey; 2004 California Center for Public Health Advocacy

<sup>2</sup> 1998-2008 Community Assessment: Health & Quality of Life in San Mateo County

<sup>3</sup> 1990-2004 San Mateo County Vital Statistics

<sup>4</sup> 2008 Community Assessment: Health & Quality of Life in San Mateo County

<sup>5</sup> 2020-2030 San Mateo County Aging Study

<sup>6</sup> California Department of Education, California Physical Fitness Test

<sup>7</sup> The RFEI for San Mateo County is currently being developed, and not all cities' RFEI have been calculated.

# Get Healthy San Mateo County Strategies

# INCREASE ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD & BEVERAGES

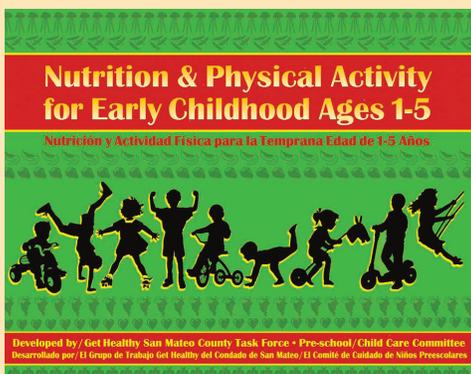
## GET HEALTHY SAN MATEO COUNTY 2005–2010 HIGHLIGHTS

### GetHealthySMC.org and YspaceSMC.org



The Get Healthy San Mateo County (GHSMC) website features a searchable directory of physical activity programs and nutrition education resources. YspaceSMC.org features a blog, run by youth who work at EPA.net, which is a venue for teens in East Palo Alto to share about eating right, being active, and ways to make their communities healthier places to live.

### Preschool/Childcare Providers' Committee



The committee developed and disseminated nearly 300 nutrition and physical activity recommendation guides in English and Spanish for children ages 1–5.

## STRATEGY I: Access & Promotion

- A. Provide incentives for the development, improvement and preservation of food retail outlets offering affordable, healthy foods
- B. Increase community-based efforts offering healthier and affordable food items, such as farmers markets, community gardens, community-supported agriculture, and mobile produce markets
- C. Support after-school programs, child care facilities, recreation centers and other institutions implementing policies and practices promoting healthy foods
- D. Increase the availability and promotion of safe, fresh drinking water in public places and institutions, support the adoption of building codes and/or local ordinances to protect drinking water
- E. Increase the percentage of mothers who exclusively breastfeed their babies beyond the first six months of life
- F. Implement education and promotion strategies that contribute to healthy eating
- G. Encourage food retail stores and farmers markets to accept Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) checks and Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards

## STRATEGY II: Locally Grown & Produced Food

- H. Develop strong markets for locally grown and produced food by encouraging schools, hospitals, County facilities, and other large institutions to procure local, healthy foods
- I. Support local farmers through developing effective marketing strategies and local distribution methods
- J. Implement promotion strategies that raise awareness and increase consumption of locally grown and produced food (e.g. San Mateo County's "As Fresh as it Gets" campaign to label locally-grown produce)



## STRATEGY III: Reduce Unhealthy Foods

- K. Adopt policies and practices that reduce or eliminate the availability of calorie-dense, nutrient-poor food and beverages (e.g. tax strategies, land use and zoning policies)
- L. Eliminate advertising and restrict the availability of calorie-dense, nutrient poor foods and beverages near schools, parks, overburdened communities and other identified arenas

### GET HEALTHY SAN MATEO COUNTY 2005–2010 HIGHLIGHTS

#### The SMC Food System Alliance



A coalition of farmers, fishermen, public health officials, environmental advocates, and residents interested in improving the county's food system held a Speed Dating event to begin dialogue between hospital food service directors and growers. Farm-to-school efforts are also focusing on school districts at highest risk for obesity and other health conditions associated with a lack of access to healthy foods.

#### Youth Ministries



The African American Community Health Advisory Committee (AACHAC) youth ministry is incorporating healthy eating and active living into their church and community activities. During Soda Free Summer, "Out of Service" signs were placed on church vending machines to discourage consumption.

# INCREASE EVERYDAY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

## STRATEGY I:

### Active Transportation Environment

- A.** Improve the safety, design and connectivity of the county's bike and pedestrian infrastructure to increase the number of people walking and bicycling for everyday transportation
- B.** Increase the number of cities with master plans that include pedestrian and bicycle environments
- C.** Support programs that increase walking and bicycling for transportation and recreation through education and promotion

## STRATEGY II:

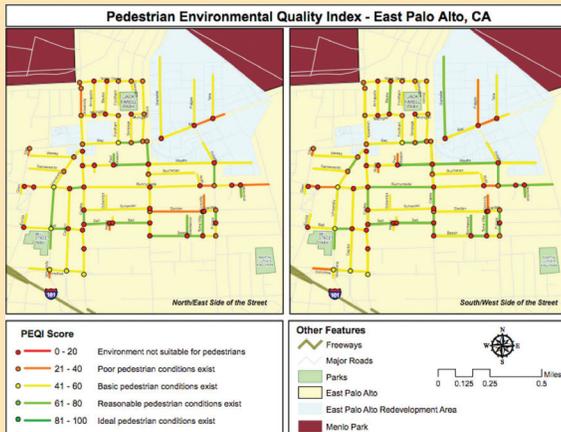
### Physical Activity Access & Promotion

- D.** Increase the availability of safe, high-quality parks, playgrounds, and indoor and outdoor sports and recreation facilities with affordable programming in all neighborhoods
- E.** Support institutions such as after-school programs, child care facilities, and recreation centers implementing policies and practices promoting active living
- F.** Increase access to schools, parks, and other destinations via affordable public transportation, safe sidewalks and street crossings
- G.** Create and promote physical activity programming in various neighborhoods, such as fitness classes, supervised play, youth athletics



## GET HEALTHY SAN MATEO COUNTY 2005–2010 HIGHLIGHTS

### Youth United for Community Action of East Palo Alto



Youth implemented a pedestrian quality survey to analyze the safety and accessibility of streets and intersections in neighborhoods disproportionately impacted by health inequities.

### North Fair Oaks Community Plan Process

A collaborative effort integrating health into planning and land use policies. Based on detailed analyses and community input, the plan will emphasize transit-oriented and mixed-use development and improve public transit and safe pedestrian and bicycle infrastructures.



### Streets Alive

San Mateo County joined cities across the globe to celebrate the World Health Organization's *1,000 Cities, 1,000 Lives* campaign. Streets Alive in San Mateo County opened streets and highlighted public places such as parks, plazas and trails as a way to promote healthy outdoor activity and experience the freedom of safe, car-free spaces.



**On the Move on Open Streets**  
 • Be Active • Be Healthy • Be Car-Free

# IMPROVE FOOD & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

## STRATEGY I:

### Food in the School Environment

- A. Support and provide incentives for the implementation of School Wellness policies and other nutrition promotion efforts
- B. Increase and encourage healthy food availability, consumption and education, integrate garden-based education into school curriculum (e.g. farm-to-school programs, school gardens)
- C. Reduce access to unhealthy foods at or near schools
- D. Implement healthy eating promotion strategies for students, teachers and parents through nutrition education, healthy fundraising, and social marketing

## STRATEGY II:

### Physical Activity in the School Environment

- E. Support Safe Routes to School and/or Walking School Bus programs to increase the number of children safely walking and bicycling to and from school and after-school programs
- F. Support and provide incentives for implementing and sustaining physical activity programming in schools and local neighborhoods

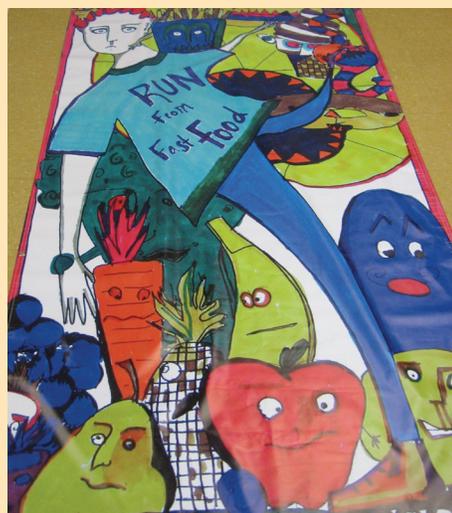
## GET HEALTHY SAN MATEO COUNTY 2005–2010 HIGHLIGHTS

### School Wellness Committee



Awarded 14 mini-grants to school districts throughout San Mateo. The Cabrillo School District implemented the “Growing Garden” program, which established on-campus easy box gardens that served as learning labs for students.

### Project HEART



Youth from Jefferson Union High School District developed social marketing materials, including banners, posters, videos, hip hop music and activity guides to encourage other youth to eat healthy foods and to exercise more frequently.

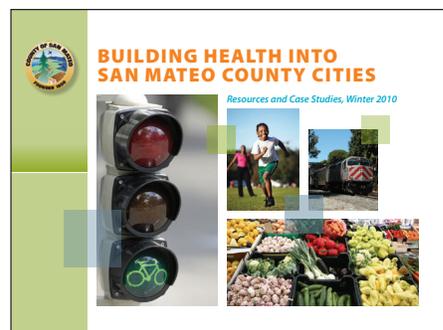
# Implementation Actions

## TAKE ACTION

Implementing the Get Healthy San Mateo County Strategies for Improving Food and Physical Activity Environments will require many actions. In order to facilitate this implementation, a series of Take Action documents and resources will be developed by the GHSMC Task Force and available at [www.gethealthysmc.org](http://www.gethealthysmc.org). The first of these is *Building Health into San Mateo County Cities: Resources and Case Studies*.

### Other actions include:

- **Healthy Corner Stores:** Collaborate with corner stores to change product placement, increase shelf space for healthier items and use point-of-sale marketing to encourage people to buy healthful food
- **Land Use and Zoning:** Adopt land use policies that limit fast food establishments in overburdened communities
- **Tax Strategies:** Increase the cost of purchasing foods and beverages that have minimal nutritional value through taxes
- **Community Gardens:** Convert underused parcels to community gardens and adopt land use codes that facilitate the establishment of backyard, neighborhood and community gardens
- **Social Marketing Campaigns:** Change behaviors by developing and/or implementing social marketing campaigns (e.g. "Project Heart Toolkit" or the "Soda-Free Summers")
- **Joint Use Agreements:** Sign agreements that allow school playgrounds, fields and recreation facilities to be used by the community during non-school hours
- **Promotores/Health Navigators:** Train and pay community leaders to provide programs and advocate for local neighborhood programming that promotes physical activity
- **Proximity of Unhealthy Foods to Schools:** Restrict the number and type of fast food outlets and unhealthy mobile food vendors around schools, at school events and in playgrounds through local ordinances



## LOCAL ACTION IN A STATE AND NATIONAL CONTEXT

The infrastructure that supports or takes away from health is very local: the streets upon which we walk, bike and drive, the parks that invite children to play, the corner markets and grocery stores within walkable distance of our homes, the buses that stop on our corner or several corners away, the sports teams our children play on, the planning codes that prohibit or invite tall buildings, the trees on the streets and plazas where we sit.

There is also a significant national and state context to the work undertaken in San Mateo County. The feasibility of addressing childhood obesity and making sure healthy is the easiest option can be supported or stymied by state and federal policies and resources.

- Federal subsidies profoundly impact the cost of healthy and unhealthy foods. The federal reimbursement rates given to schools for lunch and breakfast programs shape the food that is served; and taxes and fees can make unhealthy foods and drinks more expensive and less viable for many. In addition, transportation dollars allocated at the national and state levels promote car travel as the most subsidized form of transportation, and shifting these subsidies could make walking and biking an easier option for many.
- As a requirement for receiving public funds, state and federal agencies can include stipulations that allow or restrict healthy and unhealthy options, such as allowing or prohibiting the presence of soda machines in schools or other public buildings, requiring the placement of affordable housing near transportation centers, and prioritizing parks in underserved neighborhoods.

### A Call to Action

At this particular moment, when the California Governor and the United States First Lady have each made a call to action and put forth plans to address childhood obesity, there are many pieces of new legislation, funding proposals and reauthorizations that can support our local efforts and help us achieve our goals more quickly. Some of these are already adopted, but require thorough implementation, and others were proposed this year (2010) and require both adoption and implementation.

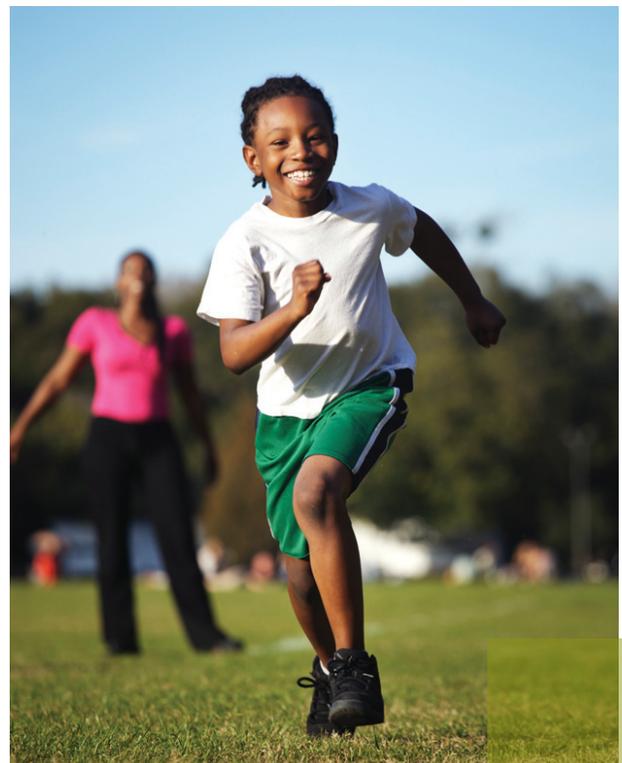


## FEDERAL ACTION

- Reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act: This bill will shape school, after-school and preschool food service by determining nutrition standards and commensurate funding for meals
- Adoption and implementation of the Livable Communities Act of 2009: Once adopted, this bill will direct funding and policy towards the development of transportation-friendly, high density, complete communities
- Implementation of the Healthy Food Financing Initiative: This is a federal allocation of more than \$400 million made in 2010 to invest in new and expanded supermarkets, farmers markets and other food stores in “food deserts”: areas where people have very few fresh food options
- Adoption of the Complete Streets Act: This is a proposed federal bill directing state Departments of Transportation and Metropolitan Planning Organizations to adopt and implement local policies to ensure that streets are as accessible to pedestrians and bicyclists as they are to cars; the bill establishes a complete streets requirement for all federal transportation funding

## STATE OF CALIFORNIA

- Implementation of the Strategic Growth Council: This collaborating body was created in 2010 to support the coordinated development of healthy, sustainable communities
- Streamline and increase funding for Joint Use Agreements: This proposed bill would increase use of community and school facilities for structured physical activities (AB 2705)
- Several recently-adopted bills aim to increase the healthfulness of food served in K-12 public schools:
  - SB 12: Improves food nutrition standards
  - SB 281: Includes more fruits and vegetables in school meal programs, including a \$18.2 million funding mechanism
  - SB 965: Bans sale of soda in high schools
  - SB 1413: Increases access to free drinking water during meal times (SB 1413)
  - SB 1255: Bans the sale of electrolyte replacement beverages (sports drinks) in middle and high schools
- Several recently-adopted bills move to increase the amount of structured physical activity during the school day and after school:
  - AB 2705: Requires after school programs to provide at least 30 minutes of physical activity each day
  - AB 2705: Requires 50 percent of school physical education class time be spent on moderate to vigorous activity



## GET HEALTHY SAN MATEO COUNTY TASK FORCE MEMBERS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Grateful acknowledgements are due to the many organizations, Get Healthy San Mateo County Task Force committees and members, community leaders and County staff who have given generously of their time, expertise, commitment and enthusiasm during the past five years of implementing the *Prevention of Childhood Obesity Blueprint* and developing the *Strategies for Improving the Food & Physical Activity Environments in San Mateo County*:

African-American Community Health Advisory Committee	JobTrain	San Mateo County Food System Alliance
Ag Innovations Network	John Gardner Center of Stanford University	San Mateo County Harbor District
Blue House Farm	Junior League of Palo Alto-Mid-Peninsula, Inc.	San Mateo County Office of Education
Boys and Girls Clubs of San Mateo County	Kaiser Foundation Hospital/Health Plan/Kaiser Permanente Community Benefit	San Mateo County Resource Conservation District
Childcare Coordinating Council (4Cs) of San Mateo County	Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health	San Mateo County Convention & Visitors Bureau
Cipriani After-School Care, Inc.	Lord's Gym, East Palo Alto	San Mateo Medical Center
Cities in San Mateo County	Mills-Peninsula Health Services	School Districts in San Mateo County
Coastside Children's Programs	Nuestra Casa	Second Harvest Food Bank of San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties
Coastside Health Committee	Nursing Mothers Counsel	Sequoia Hospital
Collective Roots	One East Palo Alto	Sequoia Healthcare District
Committee for Green Foothills	Peninsula Bicycle & Pedestrian Coalition	Seton Medical Center/Seton Coastside
Community Development Institute	Our Second Home	Shaping Youth
Conexions	Pacifica Collaborative	Silicon Valley Community Foundation
Dairy Council of California	Parks and Recreation Departments in San Mateo County	Starlings Volleyball Club, San Mateo County Chapter
Daly City Peninsula Partnership	Partnership for a Safe and Healthy Pacifica	Sustainable San Mateo County
East Palo Alto Community Health Roundtable	Peninsula Health Care District	Swanton Berry Farm
El Concilio of San Mateo County	Peninsula Interfaith Action	Tongan Interfaith Action
EPA.net	Peninsula Library System Community Information Program	University of California Berkeley Undergraduate Public Health Coalition
Fa'a Pasifika	Pie Ranch	University of California Cooperative Extension, San Mateo and San Francisco Counties
Family Service Early Learning Center	Playworks Education Energized	University of California, San Francisco
Get Healthy San Mateo County Committees	Police Activities League Prevention Institute	Visión y Compromiso
Grand Boulevard Initiative	Project Read	YMCAs in San Mateo County
Half Moon Bay Community School	ProSocial Communications	Youth and Family Enrichment Services
Harley Farms	Puente de la Costa Sur	Youth Commissioners
Health at Every Size	Ravenswood Family Health Center	Youth Leadership Institute
Health Environment Agriculture Learning (The HEAL Project)	Redwood City 2020	Youth United for Community Action
Health Plan of San Mateo	Samaritan House	
Healthy Communities Collaborative	San Mateo County Farm Bureau	
Hospital Consortium of San Mateo County		
Institute for Human and Social Development		



## Questions? Comments?

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The San Mateo County Board of Supervisors launched *Healthy Communities San Mateo County: A Community Health Improvement Initiative to Eliminate Health Disparities* in 2004. This document is part of the initiative.



*Healthy Communities*  
SAN MATEO COUNTY

## San Mateo County Board of Supervisors

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