



United to Reduce Childhood Obesity in North America

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Today in North America, 1 in every 3 children under the age of 18 is overweight or obese. These children are at risk of developing chronic illnesses that will affect their lifelong health and well-being. And this, in turn, affects prosperity and economic growth. In fact, across the globe, obesity siphons off approximately \$2 trillion from the world economy every year (1).

We recognize that the influences on child obesity in our countries are environmental, socio-economic and behavioral. And we know that the conditions necessary for healthy lives are not equally available to all. Some families, neighborhoods and communities cannot access affordable and nutritious foods and have fewer opportunities for regular physical activity. This is especially true in communities underserved by public transportation, fresh food outlets, recreation facilities and green spaces.

That's why our nations are taking action. The article from our nations in this issue of the Pan American Journal of Public Health illustrates our commitment to working together so that children can grow up at healthy weights, and society can provide the supportive environments to achieve this goal. Each of our nations, individually, has set out comprehensive frameworks that cross sectors, along with goal-oriented action plans. We are implementing programs like *Let's Move!* in the United States; the *National Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Overweight, Obesity and Diabetes* in Mexico; and *Curbing Childhood Obesity: A Federal, Provincial and Territorial Framework for Action to Promote Healthy Weights* in Canada. Children across North America are healthier today because of those efforts.

To paraphrase an old proverb, even though we can go fast alone, we can always go farther together. That is why our nations have pioneered the first trilateral initiative for noncommunicable diseases in North America. Our collaboration unites technical and policy experts in each of our national health departments and agencies. It promotes innovation and evaluation, sharing what we are learning, and building on successes so that programs and policies can continually improve. While trilateral initiatives to fight infectious diseases already exist, this is our first collaboration to tackle a longstanding, chronic health condition (2).

Our collaboration will grow over time. We begin our work together by focusing on active living. Routine physical activity is an essential part of overall good health. And creating and reinforcing the conditions that support active living are necessary in our countries. We can improve the way we use data, implement new, evidence-based interventions and build innovative partnerships across the public, not-for-profit and private sectors. Our commitment to help future generations live healthier lives and fight the devastating consequences of obesity marks the beginning of a productive and promising journey together.

As the World Health Organization's Report of the Commission on *Ending Childhood Obesity* states, we need to strengthen the political commitment to fight childhood obesity. We need to collaborate with other government institutions, and build alliances with stakeholders beyond government to foster joint ownership and shared responsibility.

With this initiative, our countries are taking a decisive step to help reduce childhood obesity, because we recognize that the stakes of inaction are far too high for our children and the generations after them.

Our countries also have reinforced our regional commitment through the Pan American Health Organization and its 2014 Plan of Action for the Prevention of Obesity in Children and Adolescents (3).

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As we come together as Member States to participate in the 55th Directing Council meeting of the Pan American Health Organization, we are pleased to announce our North American trilateral effort to lower the rate of childhood obesity. We want every boy and girl – wherever they grow up – to have a healthier life and a brighter future.

REFERENCES

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