

VERMONT2008

Healthy Living Initiatives

Report to the Legislature on **Act 203 Sections 17, 18, 19, and 21**
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108 Cherry Street, PO Box 70
Burlington, VT 05402
1.802.863.7341
healthvermont.gov

Act 203 Sections 17, 18, 19, and 21 directs the Department of Health to submit a consolidated report to the Legislature regarding four initiatives designed to support healthy living and to reduce obesity. These initiatives focus on providing Vermonters a social and physical environment that elicits and supports healthy choices through efforts directed at the local built environment, on practices and policies in worksites, on interventions and healthcare financing related to obesity prevention, and on assuring access to healthy foods.

The Department of Health (VDH) has drawn on its experience with programs such as *Coordinated Healthy Activity Motivation and Prevention Programs (CHAMPPS)* and Fit & Healthy Vermonters, and has brought together study groups to gain additional understanding of the issues delineated in the Act.

VDH finds the following:

Section 17 Healthy Community Design Supporting Physical Activity and Access to Healthy Foods

- Literature and experience confirm that an investment in infrastructure that provides easy access to exercise opportunities and incorporates features that make walking a preferred routine creates long term health benefits.¹
- Several Vermont communities are already engaged in CHAMPPS initiatives and are using well established public health and community development methods to identify their local healthy living infrastructure needs, and implement evidence-based strategies to address their needs²

¹ <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/default.htm>

² 2008 Blueprint for Health Annual Report
<http://healthvermont.gov/prevent/blueprint/plans.aspx#legislative>

- This appears to be an efficient tool for channeling money and resources for use by local communities, while at the same time assuring that the investment will yield the desired healthy living benefit.
- Community planning processes such as zoning, land use planning and design of growth centers and revitalization projects offer opportunities to incorporate features that support healthy living. Planners, regulators and developers are interested, but because incorporation of these features into the design is generally not required, other issues are often more compelling and push long-term health considerations off the table.
- The state's response to the current economic situation may include support of development and revitalization projects and improvements in transportation infrastructure. These investments may present the legislature the opportunity to incorporate healthy living considerations into design and implementation of projects using state funding.

Section 18 Healthy Worksites

- Vermont has a strong and engaged network of public and private entities devoted to implementing worksite wellness activities in large and small businesses. Models using best-practice interventions are being disseminated through conferences and working groups.³ The VDH will continue to encourage and enhance development of this work.
- Adoption of workplace support for lactating mothers can be advanced by an existing coalition of partners, using the statutory requirement in Act 117(2008) and promotional materials developed collaboratively by VDH, the Vermont Commission on Women, the Attorney General Civil Rights Unit and the Vermont Breastfeeding Network.⁴ The Department of Health will continue to collaborate with partners, and to use its WIC program and

³ http://healthvermont.gov/family/fit/documents/WorksiteWellness_Resource.pdf

⁴ <http://healthvermont.gov/family/breastfeed/documents/Nursingwebfactsheet.pdf>

district office personnel to help inform mothers and to help recruit employers.

- The use of insurance premium discounts or other financial incentives to increase participation in worksite wellness activities by employees and employers appears to be a useful strategy. The Vermont Department of Health is engaged with other partners in reviewing this option and will make a report at a future time.

Sec. 19 Promoting Healthy Weight through Primary Care

- A pilot project to study office-based strategies for promoting healthy weight has been designed, and will be implemented in 9 practices in Vermont as part of Vermont's Blueprint for Health.⁵ This pilot draws from existing work of the Department, the College of Medicine, the Vermont Health Education Centers network, and the Vermont Child Health Improvement Program.
- Preliminary information generated by the Obesity Prevention and Treatment Workgroup⁶ suggests that insurance coverage for prevention and treatment of obesity varies widely among insurers and is poorly understood by patients and health care providers. VDH and its study group will continue to explore these issues with the goal of making health care services for prevention and treatment of obesity accessible.
- A study of public and private sector payment for obesity related services in the 50 states is currently being prepared by the National Initiative for Children's Healthcare Quality (NICHQ). Several Vermont health care professionals are participating in preparation of that study. As a result, the findings will become available to policy makers in Vermont as the study progresses.

⁵ 2008 Blueprint for Health Annual Report
<http://healthvermont.gov/prevent/blueprint/plans.aspx#legislative>

⁶ Appendix Obesity Workgroup membership

Sec. 21 Menu Labeling and Elimination of Trans Fat in Prepared Foods

- The literature reveals that consumers are unable to estimate the caloric content of prepared foods from the menu description, and that appropriate labeling of menus significantly supports healthy food choices by consumers.⁷
- VDH will continue to collaborate with others to implement voluntary labeling of menu items and will try to avoid the incomplete labeling that has characterized some voluntary programs in other jurisdictions. VDH will monitor the need to recommend implementation of more effective and evidence-based interventions.
- Trans fats in foods are associated with heart disease⁸, and several jurisdictions have passed laws to reduce their use in prepared foods in order to address this risk. There is significant interest in introducing similar legislation in Vermont but VDH finds that information about the health consequences of currently available substitutes for trans fat in prepared foods is insufficient to guide legislation

⁷ Menu Labeling In Chain Restaurants: Opportunities for Public Policy, RUDD Center for Food Policy & Obesity, Yale University, 2008.

<http://www.yaleruddcenter.org/reports/pdfs/RuddMenuLabelingReport2008.pdf>

⁸ Acherio, A., Stampfer, M., Willett, W. "Trans Fatty Acids and Coronary Heart Disease". Harvard School of Public Health, Background and Scientific Review: <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/reviews/transfats.html>