

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE

April 3, 2013

1:33 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Bert Stedman, Chair
Senator Peter Micciche, Vice Chair

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Kevin Meyer
Senator Pete Kelly
Senator Johnny Ellis

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION: PREVENTING CHILDHOOD OBESITY

- HEARD

WITNESS REGISTER

KAROL FINK, Obesity Prevention and Control Program Manager
Division of Public Health
Department of Health and Social Services
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information related to Preventing Childhood Obesity.

ANN POTEMLA, Public Health Communication Specialist
Division of Public Health
Department of Health and Social Services
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information related to Preventing Childhood Obesity.

ACTION NARRATIVE

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CHAIR BERT STEDMAN called the Senate Health and Social Services Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:33 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senator Micciche and Chair Stedman.

PRESENTATION: PREVENTING CHILDHOOD OBESITY

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CHAIR STEDMAN announced that the only order of business would be a presentation on preventing childhood obesity.

KAROL FINK, Obesity Prevention and Control Program Manager, Division of Public Health, Department of Health and Social Services, presented information related to Preventing Childhood Obesity. She shared her professional background and work history as a dietitian where she became aware of the importance of good nutrition and physical activity as preventative measures. She listed the topics that would be discussed in the presentation.

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MS. FINK described why it is important to care about obesity. Obesity is associated with poor health outcomes in adults and in childhood, as well as associated with poor academic performance and increased absenteeism in students. The American Academy of Pediatrics now has guidelines for the treatment of children with diabetes due to the prevalence of obesity in children. She said for the first time in modern history, today's younger generation will live shorter and less healthy lives than their parents due to obesity.

MS. FINK related that a recent report from the Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center found that obesity is currently the leading cause of ineligibility for first-time active duty applicants.

MS. FINK shared that millions are spent on a preventable condition. In Alaska, close to half a billion dollars is spent annually on obesity-attributable expenditures.

She explained that it is known that preventing obesity could reduce Alaska Medicaid spending. In Alaska, \$459 million is spent annually on a mostly preventable condition. By 2030, Alaska may be paying close to \$300 million per year just for the state's share of Medicaid dollars needed to cover direct medical costs of obesity.

SENATOR MICCICHE asked if the curve would look the same for any medical condition.

MS. FINK agreed that increased costs to Medicare over time are projected. The graph shows rising costs related to obesity.

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SENATOR MICCICHE said the health care cost curve looks like the obesity cost graph.

MS. FINK clarified that obesity is projected to rise and incur greater costs.

MS. FINK showed a graph with the rate of Alaska adult obesity rising, which has more than doubled in the last 20 years.

MS. FINK showed a map that depicts different rates of obesity in Alaska. She said two out of three Alaskan adults are overweight or obese.

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MS. FINK talked about obesity in children. She said three out of ten children in Alaska are overweight or obese. She said that of 2-4 year olds enrolled in the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program, 41 percent are overweight or obese.

MS. FINK reported that Alaskans don't know that kids need 60 minutes of physical activity every day and that obese kids do worse in school. However, Alaskans do know that obesity is hurting our kids and that there are health risks from childhood obesity. They also know the causes of obesity.

MS. FINK stressed that knowledge does not equal behavior and kids are drinking sugary drinks, not eating enough fruits and vegetables, and not getting enough physical activity.

MS. FINK stated that Alaskans care that children are obese. A variety of agencies are responsible for addressing obesity. Alaskans Taking on Childhood Obesity (ATCO) is a coalition that tries to prevent childhood obesity.

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MS. FINK shared DHSS's goal to decrease childhood obesity by five percent in five years. The plan has been shaped by best practices and with input from the ATCO membership. She said ATCO's first initiative is to support Alaska's schools to make good nutrition and physical activity the easy choice. Together with DOE and the school health collaborate workgroup, ATCO developed the Alaska School Health and Safety Framework to improve student health. It is important that services are evidence based and supported by those who will be impacted.

She noted the lack of physical education programs in schools. She said that ATCO will provide training for teachers who are assigned to teach physical education.

MS. FINK said with the department's support, more students will learn skills for an active life. Physical education targets this goal. The department will work in partnership to develop PE standards and offer training and equipment. Through the initiative, there are 53 schools that participate in PE training.

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MS. FINK described how kids are eating healthier school meals due to the partnership. More kids are eating Alaska salmon and local Alaska food, and more schools have gardens. The coalition has partnered with DOE, the Division of Agriculture, and the Department of Environmental Conservation to support this effort. The coalition will be hosting the 7th annual School Health & Wellness Institute next fall.

MS. FINK talked about how the coalition knows it is being effective. It collects feedback from those who are trained by the coalition. She used Kodiak Island School District as an example.

MS. FINK showed a graph depicting a decrease in the number of schools that sell sugary drinks and junk food. From 2006 to 2012 the number of schools selling soda dropped to 21 percent from 50 percent and the number of schools selling candy dropped to 16 percent from 41 percent.

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MS. FINK discussed concrete measures that show a decline in the weight of students. She showed a graph of the Anchorage School District's decline in obesity where obesity has declined, but not to previous levels. She showed another slide that included obesity-related initiatives that had an effect on the outcome. She listed some of the tactics the Anchorage School District took in order to reduce obesity, such as adopting a wellness policy that bans the sale or provision of junk food.

SENATOR MICCICHE said it "looks tough" to only have a two percent drop in obesity. He opined that it involves a lot of work, but it is moving in the right direction.

MS. FINK added that there is a lot more work to do.

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ANN POTEPA, Public Health Communication Specialist, Division of Public Health, Department of Health and Social Services, presented information relate to Preventing Childhood Obesity. She discussed the health benefits linked to the 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans.

She reported that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention published "The DCD Guide to Strategies to Increase Physical Activity in the Community" in 2011. The first strategy shown to work is building a community-wide campaign, so that is what DHSS did. The focus of the campaign, Play Every Day, is on childhood obesity prevention.

MS. POTEPA referenced articles about the Mat-Su and Anchorage Schools Districts which reported some success in battling obesity.

MS. POTEPA talked about building awareness and increasing the knowledge about childhood obesity through a variety of educational messages.

She shared the recipe for a campaign to change behaviors. It needs to be sustained, not short-lived, large in scale, wide in reach, backed by research to better understand the audience, use effective messages focused on changing behaviors, and have multiple means to deliver educational messages.

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MS. POTEPA showed the Play Every Day web site. She talked about partnering for physical activity and building community support. A successful community-wide campaign must have community involvement. She reported that they worked with partners to extend their reach and built a team of people and programs reinforcing the same message. They offered events that promote the behavior change.

MS. POTEPA described Healthy Futures program which is run for three months, both in the fall and in the spring. She described the Healthy Futures challenge. The goal is sixty minutes a day of physical activity and results in a prize. Schools and students both benefit from Healthy Futures; schools receive grants for sports or health equipment.

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MS. POTEPA said DHSS is not the only partner of Healthy Futures. Other partners are Providence Health and Services,

United Way of Anchorage, ConocoPhillips, and the Alaska Kidney Foundation.

MS. POTEPA described a graph that shows how much growth has occurred as a result of participating in Healthy Futures.

SENATOR MICCICHE asked if that is statewide.

MS. POTEPA said yes. She reported that 14 percent of elementary-age children are participating in Healthy Futures. She continued to say that there are now 124 schools participating and over 8,000 students have turned in logs so far.

MS. POTEPA described partnering with parents and with local athletes for Healthy Futures. She used Ma'o Tosi as an example of an athlete, father, and advocate for children. She described the benefits of parents being active with their children. She said Scott Gomez is another partner, as is Kikkan Randall.

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MS. POTMEPA shared some success stories as a result of Healthy Futures. She described the Bowman Elementary program, which had 100 percent participation in February of 2013. She related that Ravenwood Elementary in Eagle River was also very successful.

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SENATOR MICCICHE asked if they are collecting data regarding physical fitness improvements from Healthy Futures.

MS. POTMEPA said they are not at this time.

She talked about Badger Road Elementary in North Pole and quoted the PE teacher from there. "Healthy Futures is well worth my time and energy to put into it. There isn't another program out there like it. It's an opportunity for kids to achieve extra activities for a healthier life."

MS. POTMEPA showed a map that depicts the success of Healthy Futures Challenge across Alaska. There are currently 124 schools involved with Healthy Futures. She said this is how Alaska's parents can make the healthy choice for their children the easy choice. Alaska's kids are hearing the same healthy message from their teachers and their parents and others. She concluded that children and adults are becoming healthier because of efforts to reduce obesity.

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CHAIR STEDMAN asked about expanding the reduction of sugar drinks in schools.

MS. FINK mentioned proposed federal guidelines regarding sugar drinks in schools. She suggested waiting for the final FDA ruling before taking action at the state level. She said the plan would then be to provide school support through training and technical assistance to implement the new rules.

SENATOR MICCICHE noted that his generation had junk food, but always played outside. Today, kids are fed well, but lack exercise. He suggested that sedentary behavior might be a more important factor than diet. He applauded the department's efforts, but maintained that parents have some responsibility for their children's fitness.

CHAIR STEDMAN thanked the presenters.

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There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Stedman adjourned the Senate Health and Social Services Standing Committee at 2:18 p.m.