

Deliberative Conversations at the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library November 2019

How Should We Reduce Obesity in America?

Learn more about this NIF issue guide at <https://www.nifi.org/en/issue-guide/how-should-we-reduce-obesity-america>

Obesity is a health problem that is growing rapidly in the United States and other parts of the world. In this country, it is epidemic. About one in three Americans is obese.

It may be natural for people to gain at least a little weight later in life. But that is no longer the issue. The problem today is that by the time American children reach their teens, nearly one in five is already obese, a condition all too likely to continue into adulthood.

This issue guide asks: How should we reduce obesity in America? It presents three different options for deliberation, each rooted in something held widely valuable and representing a different way of looking at the problem. No one option is the “correct” one, and each option includes drawbacks and trade-offs that we will have to face if we are to make progress on this issue. The options are presented as a starting point for deliberation.

Help People Lose Weight

Take a proactive stance in helping people lose weight— persuasion and education by families and doctors, and the establishment of consequences by employers and insurance companies. Losing weight is a personal decision but it is one that affects all of us.

Improve the Way Our Food Is Produced and Marketed

Although our food system does a good job of keeping the cost of food low, many of the resulting products are both very unhealthy and very enticing. We need to get better control of our food production system, including how foods are marketed to us, and ensure more equitable access to healthy foods.

Create a Culture of Healthy Living and Eating

This option would promote overall, lifelong wellness by making sure our children start learning to make better choices as early as possible. This option also calls for reshaping our neighborhoods and buildings to help us get more exercise.

The following are transcribed notes from notetaker flipcharts during a 2019 Deliberative Conversation at the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library. Each deliberation is different based on the people in the room participating. The notetaker was working quickly during a fast-paced conversation and these notes are intended to capture the main ideas and points of interest throughout the deliberation. We hope the notes remind participants of topics highlighted during the deliberation and that the notes are useful to others in expanding their understanding of these topics in our community. For more information, upcoming deliberation schedule, or to view other notes from deliberative conversations, visit <https://www.tscpl.org/conversations> or email connect@tscpl.org

Option 1 Help People Lose Weight

Take a proactive stance in helping people lose weight— persuasion and education by families and doctors, and the establishment of consequences by employers and insurance companies. Losing weight is a personal decision but it is one that affects all of us.

Vending machines -alter to fill with healthier choices

Tradeoff- snickers not available now (local hospital example)

Stronger food policy – substitutes may be works for you – consumers made be mad about changes

Go back to 'real food' for high school and junior high kids instead of starving them with only offering the USDA newly formulated calorie limits. – The federal standards of school lunches aren't working for kids who need or want more calories. Instead of unpacking processed foods at the site, real cooking on site.

Incentives could include walking more or to have health workgroups in workplaces.

The state offers some incentives with their wellness program and points to earn by behaviors. Some prefer incentives for showing actions toward healthy changes/behaviors versus penalties for high BMI. Naturally Slim is one example program.

Discussion around addiction to sugar and smoking cessation and health insurance costs for certain conditions – transplants or mental health issues

Large corporations are the ones getting the money and profits, but I don't care about their profit. Their decisions don't benefit me. Who is responsible for decisions that benefit our health?

When corporations are more concerned about their bottom line – the employees don't benefit

Incentives might supplement education/ raise awareness more

OR – people might game the system to cycle their weight loss for more incentives

PSAs – on talk radio, waste of money –

It's common sense that salt/sugar is bad, that is preached to us all the time – how will you ge the message to people for PSAs? And if it alongside ads for salty/sugary processed foods what is the real message?

What if you live in a community where salt/sugar choices is all you see? What if you could decrease the advertising?

What studies between school districts with different policies on advertising food to kids show a longer-term difference in their healthy choices or health outcomes as adults?

Financial situations are realities

Do people go to the doctor and hear eating advice?

I think that's just ridiculous, to help people lose weight through direct intervention

Interesting note: The organizer didn't order a plate of cookies to share at this discussion
How do we lock up all the sugars and prevent people from choosing them?

Option 2 Improve the Way Our Food Is Produced and Marketed

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Shawnee County loses traditional grocery stores over the years

Consumers want to get bang for the buck

Even with incentives, helping inner city stores like dollar tree and dollar general offer fresh produce or healthier options adds risk and not profit for them.

Inviting people in for free stuff is inviting a perceived dangerous element. Businesses are not charities.

City could make systemic change in business permits to help keep more stores/groceries in the areas and encourage groceries being stocked in existing stores,

Incentives or rules for keeping services/stock in stores

What the market will bear – corporations will spend much time and money on convincing me that I need what they are selling me.

High pressure push and consistent advertising for consumers to want the items that business profits from selling.

Should food ads be regulated like ATF? (alcohol/tobacco/firearms, if the health hazards are also real?)

Improve the way our food is produced and marketed

We notice local grocery stores remodeling toward the opposite of improving to market healthy foods

Re-evaluate farm subsidies for food/ethanol

Deliberate the tradeoffs for environment and consumer health tradeoffs of cheaper products

Change education so they can change what they are planning in fields

Either way farm subsidies control the market

Kansas has some challenges even more than the other things on this national list, KS has food sales tax.

Get more attention to farmer's markets

How long to we have to wait for change on some of these obvious things – do we get caught in the systems building instead of just doing it?

Example from another topic: When people saw they could make a profit with private schools, they helped make federal funding shifts toward their profit opportunities

Tradeoff – what if ALL the grassroots efforts can't make a change because the production and marketers are still profiting?

If there is a way to make a profit, someone wants to make it and they want to government to keep making it profitable. The grassroots efforts come too late to intervene in the business model of the food production/marketers.

Option 3 Create a Culture of Healthy Living and Eating

This option would promote overall, lifelong wellness by making sure our children start learning to make better choices as early as possible. This option also calls for reshaping our neighborhoods and buildings to help us get more exercise.

Public schools can teach healthy cooking

Recipes and make the help easier to access and use – “do your homework” to match up and tailor the help to the student/consumer/recipient

Harvesters can teach cooking and preparation and nutrition

Getting away from sidewalks was just plain dumb

What was going on when those changes were made in neighborhood design? Historically design changes reflect the times – Highland Park was built without sidewalks – TV/air conditioners replaced front porches. People lived far from work, neighborhoods designed for commuters and driving

Sidewalks – if it was a “have to do” in the plans, the disuasion would be different

Envy Douglas County/college students – why is it so different there?

What is going well locally? Banks do benefit from funding businesses with senior audiences. Topeka is making changes in physical activity

First Friday gets people out walking

Azura sponsoring the hiking trail at Burnett’s Mound and activities

Example of system change at small scale level - Asking for change you want but the change affects other people so now their option is healthier also (low salt popcorn example)

Physical fitness promoted more – even on the news!

Middle school physical education has them run a mile ever day. Discussing structured PE class versus unstructured recess play

The structural issue of the time crunch for families – cooking and dishes and cleanup take time. People need options for health living. Not one size fits all – we have a generation of adults who never saw their parents cook

Reflections/Wrap up

Where did we have some agreement? Where did we see tension? Who wasn't here today with us in our deliberation? What if other people were in the room? What other options would we consider in this deliberation?

Reflections

Advertising is so insidious – for all the things they products they are paying to advertise is supplementing what we are wanting to watch in media, so there is some trade offs and give and take

This is a war. People pick which side you want to be on. It sources easy but...

Small changes, keep moving forward.

Example given of a person who didn't have the physical ability to get to their job after a period of unemployment. When you aren't working, keep building up your stamina.

Option 4 – A whole person approach that considers mental health

These options are not one size fits all

Miracle cures – “weight loss” still isn't a magic cure for health concerns or the societal systems

Poverty

Depression

Body image

Sexual harassment

Addiction

emotional eating/ food is love/comfort food

Different times and many cultures – larger/heavier bodies showed prosperity

Where is the science?

What terms are we hung up on? Morbidly Obese is terrifying and not motivating

Science is not culturally based. Studies are not on everyone, traditionally only on certain groups who are studied

How does obesity affect us all? Why should we take action? Quality of life, commercials, folks around you, walkers

Areas of consensus

Profit comes above everything

Pack lunch

Make choices based on calorie count

Making food saving money

Confusing science around food – do's and don'ts and changes and who changes the rules and why?

How does obesity happen? As a society we stopped physical activity – food changed or increased eating

Areas for future research and discussion

How do we change state testing incentives so healthy behaviors for lifelong good health are rewarded?

Could we report BMI? Minutes of exercise by classroom?

Education for transition from high school to college to working to married/family.

(start right so there is less back tracking later)

Lifetime fitness model

Lifetime nutrition model

Access to stationary bikes in backs of classrooms

How do we “make” people make healthier choices without controlling them