



Building Healthy Communities

**The California Endowment Approach
to Improving Food and Physical Activity Environments**



Healthy Places Lead to Healthy People

At the California Endowment, we believe that what surrounds us shapes us—that our environment shapes our bodies, our minds and our health. We share responsibility for creating healthier environments. Schools, government, business, community organizations and individuals all have a vital role to play. Private foundations can play a powerful role in bringing all these interests together to find the best solutions for California.



Improving Physical and Social Environments

Some building blocks of healthy communities are well known, like clean air, safe drinking water and quality health care. Others aren't as widely understood, like access to fresh produce, the number of walking trails and bike paths and the availability of after-school programs where children can play and be active. All of these things have an important impact on our children's health and the health of our communities.

Among researchers and other experts, there is strong agreement that these healthy building blocks are essential to promoting the future

success of our communities. When youth have parks and recreational programs nearby, they get more exercise. When families have access to healthy and affordable food, they eat better and live healthier.

By Changing Communities, We are Changing Lives

It's important for communities to invest in resources like parks and farmers markets, but it's just as critical to make sure that resources are fairly distributed. When some neighborhoods are denied a fair share, it affects the health of their residents. In part, that's why many preventable diseases, including obesity,

diabetes and asthma, are more prevalent in California's low-income communities than in higher-income areas.

The Endowment's approach to reversing the epidemic of obesity among children and youth hinges on increasing fairness and reducing health disparities by ensuring that all Californians—especially those in communities with the fewest resources—have access to healthy food and activity environments. By changing environments for the better, we can improve the lives of millions of Californians.



The Shared Consequences of Unhealthy Communities

When our communities are unhealthy, our young people suffer the most, with heightened risk for diabetes, hypertension and childhood obesity. Many experts believe that obesity is the single greatest public health threat facing our state and our nation. Some experts even predict that if we do nothing about the obesity epidemic, today's young people may be the first in American history to live sicker and die younger than their parents' generation.

When California's children suffer, we all pay the price—in higher medical costs, lower productivity in the workplace

and less vibrant communities. Altogether, obesity costs the nation an estimated \$117 billion each year in health care costs and reduced productivity.

Prevention Pays

The financial and human costs of obesity and related health conditions are largely preventable. Obesity, asthma and similar diseases are long-lasting and difficult and expensive to treat. Making smart and strategic investments to improve food and activity environments for children and youth can prevent these costs from being incurred in the first place.

Keeping people healthy is one of the most effective ways to reduce health care costs. According to a 2008 study conducted by the Trust for America's Health, an investment of \$10 per person per year in proven community-based programs to increase physical activity, improve nutrition and prevent smoking and other tobacco use could save California more than \$1.7 billion in annual health care costs within 5 years.*

*The Trust for America's Health, *Prevention for a Healthier California*, Issue Report, October, 2008



Better Policy Equals Better Health

Communities throughout the state are developing and testing innovative policies and practices to improve their community environments. From their efforts, we've learned a lot about what works, including:

- Enforcing standards for improved school nutrition and daily physical education
- Opening school grounds after hours for neighborhood use
- Increasing access to affordable fresh produce and limiting the promotion of unhealthy foods

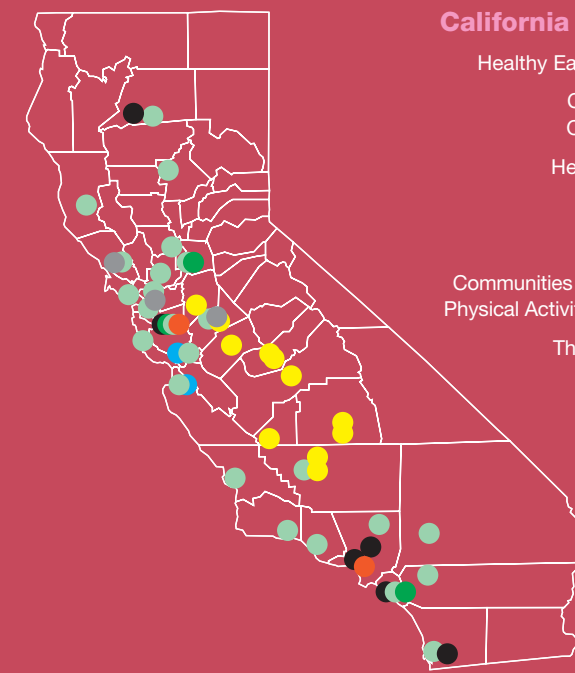
- Improving and expanding access to public parks and recreation centers
- Making streets safer for walking and biking, with rapid transit options
- Adopting smart growth policies through zoning and other land use decisions

A Community-Based, Environmental Approach
The California Endowment supports model programs that aim to improve environments for nutrition and physical activity in select communities through collaboration and

advocacy for policy change. One of our largest programs, Healthy Eating, Active Communities (HEAC), brings together schools, community organizations, local health departments and other key stakeholders in Chula Vista, Santa Ana, Baldwin Park, South Los Angeles, Oakland and South Shasta. The Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program (CCROPP) brings a similar approach to the San Joaquin Valley.

The Endowment also supports innovative research, evaluation, communications and policy advocacy efforts throughout the state, including the California Convergence, an umbrella network of more than 100 government and privately-supported community-based programs.

At a national level, the Endowment works with other leading health foundations to promote policy change as a member of the Healthy Eating Active Living Convergence Partnership.



- California Convergence Sites**
- Healthy Eating, Active Communities ●
 - Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Project ●
 - Healthy Eating Active Living ●
 - Active Living by Design ●
 - Steps to a HealthierUS ●
 - Communities of Excellence in Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity Prevention ●
 - The Food & Fitness Initiative ●



Photo by Tim Wagner for HEAC



Focusing on Policy Works

Our approach is working. Positive change is beginning to take shape in all of the places where we have been involved. For example, in Kern County the Endowment-funded Obesity Prevention Task Force helped form the Greenfield Walking Group, a group of mothers in Bakersfield who organized residents, local police and elected officials to clean up Stiern Park, making it a valuable community resource.

Community change is also taking place in Oakland, where new school-based farmers markets are giving kids and parents access to nutritious foods, providing the community with healthy options that were not previously available.

In addition to our support for local communities, we have invested over \$10 million to develop innovative tools like health impact assessments

which help community planning and public health departments make informed policy decisions in their areas.

We've also aided significant policy change at the state and national level. Notably, the passage of SB 12 and SB 965 in 2006 collectively banned the sale of junk food and soda in California's public schools. These laws, which were motivated by the success of Endowment-funded programs, ignited a national movement, inspiring similar legislation in 22 states and marking California as a national leader in creating and promoting access to healthy foods and opportunities for physical activity.

Our Future: Looking Forward

The California Endowment has learned a lot from our work to improve food and physical activity environments. It has provided us with invaluable lessons, tools, policy context

and community connections that will boost our strategic agenda moving forward.

Drawing upon lessons from this and our other work, The California Endowment is embarking on a new strategic direction: Building Healthy Communities. Our new approach supports innovative community solutions to improving food and physical activity environments and builds support for local, state and national policies that sustain those solutions.

Over the next decade, our programs will evolve. The locations of our investments may change, but our commitment to building healthy communities will remain as strong as ever.

For more information about the California Endowment's obesity prevention programs and new strategic direction, please visit www.calendow.org.



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Cover Photo: Westwood Farmers Market at the Vets' Garden, Los Angeles