Role of Policies and Practices within Early Care and Education Programs to Support Healthy Food and Physical Activity Practices

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Obesity rates among young children continue to rise in spite of earlier indications of slowing trends.¹ Healthy lifestyle behaviors, such as eating a healthy diet and engaging in regular physical activity, are important to obesity prevention, and are associated with better developmental outcomes and disease prevention in young children.^{2,3} During the early years, children need to be exposed to environments that support the development of health-promoting nutrition and physical activity behaviors. Other than one's family, early care, and education (ECE) programs are the most influential setting in the support of children's healthy weight development and represent an important "target of opportunity" for health promotion efforts.⁴ More than 60% of young children are enrolled in an out-of-home care setting, spend more than 30 hours there each week, and obtain between 50%–75% of daily calories in these settings.⁵

More than five years ago, Healthy Eating Research, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, created an ECE workgroup to bring together researchers, policy advocates, and other professionals to advance an ECE research agenda and create opportunities for information sharing and advancements in public health practice.⁶ This supplement of 13 articles published in *Childhood Obesity* unites a group of outstanding researchers focusing on the role of policies and practices within ECE programs to support healthy practices. Each article addresses one or more important influences, including public policies, such as the federally funded Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) or state licensing standards, facility-level policies for physical activity or screen-time, and food procurement practices to mention a few. This supplement is a landmark publication because it is the first to address early care and education settings, both child care centers and family child

care homes, to illustrate and guide best practices for healthy weight development.

References

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