



## PRESS RELEASE

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## **San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative Partnering with YMCA of San Diego County to Raise Awareness on Childhood Obesity**

### **New Report Highlights Obesity Rates Across County**

**SAN DIEGO – Sept. 9, 2019** – September marks Childhood Obesity Awareness month, and according to a [new report](#) released by the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative, more than one out of every three 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> graders enrolled in public schools in San Diego County are overweight or obese.

“Childhood obesity remains a pervasive challenge, and sadly current rates have not changed much from the previous report released for the 2014-2015 school year. This indicates a need for new and continued investment in our communities to address the root causes and environments that hinder children’s health,” stated Dr. Wilma Wooten, Public Health Officer with the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency.

There are many reasons high rates of overweight and obesity continue to put San Diego County’s children at risk. However, at the forefront are challenges families face such as a lack of access to affordable, healthy food choices or opportunities for physical activity by means of safe and accessible parks, neighborhoods, and places to exercise. Unfortunately, many students in San Diego County are more likely to be overweight or obese by virtue of where they live, what school they attend, their race or ethnicity, or their family’s income. For example, 42% of economically disadvantaged students struggle with overweight or obesity compared to 26% for those who are not disadvantaged. These disparate rates reflect the realities of socioeconomic environments, and highlight a major barrier for improved health in San Diego County. These disparities are further seen among racial and ethnic groups. For example, 43% of Hispanic or Latino students are overweight or obese compared to 24% of White students.

Reducing the prevalence of overweight and obese children, specifically in traditionally underserved communities, requires long-term, sustained resources, investments and partnerships across sectors to

meet neighborhood, school, family, and individual children’s needs. Families who cannot afford their housing, are food insecure, and who live in neighborhoods that are unsafe or have limited access to affordable, healthy food, are all too often among those with children who are overweight or obese. As Anahid Brakke, Executive Director of the San Diego Hunger Coalition explains, “As a nation, we struggle with the idea that a child can be both overweight and not have enough to eat. But these are 2 sides of the same coin. Families struggling to make ends meet must often sacrifice buying healthy food for cheaper, nutrient-poor options that are filling but high in calories, fat and sugar.” Many of these families belong to groups targeted by systemic racism, discrimination, or trauma, which further affects their social and emotional well-being and ability to lead healthy, thriving lives.

“There is a significant level of effort being put towards trying to address obesity and overweight rates for our youth in San Diego. However, more substantial changes in prevalence of obesity will require addressing underlying issues such as affordable housing, economic stability, and access to healthy foods, quality education, and safe opportunities for physical activity,” said Diane Moss who is the Managing Director for Project New Village, an organization working to promote the health and well-being of community members in Southeastern San Diego.

This data offers an opportunity for organizations to renew their commitment to finding solutions that will improve the health of all children and families across the county. While many of the challenges to the obesity epidemic are far-reaching, local organizations are working with the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative to address issues related to healthy food access and access to physical activity. For example, the YMCA of San Diego County are working to help raise awareness and support continued efforts to reduce and prevent childhood obesity throughout the month.

During September, the YMCA of San Diego County and other San Diego Childhood Obesity Initiative partners are promoting [the 5-2-1-0 Every Day! Campaign](#), which represents a set of simple suggestions children and families can take to improve health and prevent obesity. 5-2-1-0 Every Day! promotes the following nationally recognized and evidence-based strategies:

- **5** or more servings of fruits and vegetables,
- **2** hours or less of recreational screen time,
- **1** hour or more of physical activity, and
- **0** sugary beverages.

To address physical activity barriers, **all YMCA branches in the county are free on September 14** for an Open House. While visiting, individuals and families can learn more about 5-2-1-0 and ways to implement the strategies into their daily lives. Additionally, information will be available on financial assistance for YMCA memberships.

“The YMCA is proud to join forces with the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative and open our doors on Sept. 14 to the community,” said Baron Herdelin-Doherty, President & CEO of the YMCA of San Diego County. “We’re on a mission to serve more San Diegans through our key pillars of youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility.”

Additional organizations partnering with the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative to promote 5-2-1-0 include: Chula Vista Elementary School District; City of Chula Vista Public Library and Parks &

Recreation; County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency; Neighborhood House Association Head Start sites; Rady Children's Hospital Center for Healthier Communities; San Diego County Office of Education; San Diego Unified School District; and the UC San Diego Center for Community Health, among others.

Findings from the report will be used to inform the future efforts of partners from multiple sectors who work together as part of the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative to reduce obesity rates with an emphasis on health equity. These results are a reminder that more investment and work needs to be done to promote equity in our communities and prevent poor health outcomes for our children in the future.

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[The San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative](#) is a public-private partnership with the mission of reducing and preventing childhood obesity through policy, systems, and environmental change. The San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative is a program of *Live Well San Diego: Healthy Works* and implemented by Community health Improvement Partners.

The [YMCA of San Diego County](#) is the largest Y in the nation serving more than 435,000 San Diego County residents and employing more than 5,500 people. Through a variety of programs and services focused on youth development, healthy living and social responsibility, the Y unites men, women and children - regardless of age, income or background - to nurture the potential of children and teens, improve the nation's health and well-being, and provide opportunities to give back and support neighbors. The YMCA of San Diego County is dedicated to improving the quality of human life and to helping all people realize their fullest potential as children of God through the development of the spirit, mind and body. Visit [www.ymca.org](http://www.ymca.org) to find your local YMCA or call (858) 292-YMCA (9622).