



Ensuring Young Children Grow Up at a Healthy Weight: How Connecticut Can Catch Up to Other States



In our efforts to promote children's health and wellness, we need to ensure that they grow up at a healthy weight. Preventing children from being overweight or obese requires action in the earliest years since experts agree that reversing these trends later in life can be very difficult. It is currently estimated that [one in four](#) children are overweight or obese by the time they enter kindergarten.

Racial and ethnic minorities and those families who are poor are at higher risk of being overweight or obese. These trends are linked to social, environmental and economic disparities. Additionally, research about exposure to trauma in the early years links [adverse childhood experiences](#) to both physical and mental health challenges later in life, including the increased risk of living at an unhealthy weight. Addressing underlying causes of obesity early in children's lives, by ensuring their environments support safe, stable, nurturing relationships that foster good nutrition and adequate physical activity is a critical step to promote healthy lifelong weight.

Connecticut Lags Behind Other States in Childhood Obesity Rates and Prevention Policies

Although Connecticut has fared comparatively well to other states related to adult obesity rates, we do not do as well for children, especially low-income children. National data from two recently published reports highlight how Connecticut is doing relative to other states on early childhood obesity prevention. Data for low-income children was drawn from families participating in the federal Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

The Trust for America's Health and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's [State of Obesity in America](#) report shows that Connecticut ranks:

- [12th out of 50](#) states for highest WIC obesity rates (low-income children ages 2-4 years old)
- [23rd out of 42](#) states for highest adolescent obesity rates (students grades 9-12)
- [42nd out of 50](#) states for highest adult obesity rates (18 and older)

A new report from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) entitled, [Early Care and Education State Indicator Report](#), tracks state policies aimed at preventing obesity in child care settings and shows that Connecticut is missing opportunities to address healthy nutrition in early childhood and education settings (ECE). The [2016 report](#) examines 15 data indicators including, assessing each state’s

licensing regulations for high impact obesity prevention standards. Connecticut only had 2 out of 47 obesity prevention standards in State licensing regulations for early care and education programs and lacked ECE professional development training on obesity prevention that 42 other states offer.

The following chart highlights data from the report:

| Early Childhood Obesity Prevention Measure | Connecticut Results: 2014 | Other States: 2014 |
|--|--|--|
| Number of standards in licensing regulations out of 47 possible | 2 | The most any state fully met in 2014 was 15 in Mississippi |
| Included obesity prevention components into updated licensing standards | 2011-2014: No updates Connecticut is currently updating licensing standards | All 25 states that updated their licensing requirements from 2011-2014 included obesity prevention |
| State encourages enhanced nutrition standards in Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) | Yes | 29 states encourage enhanced nutrition standards in their state CACFP program |
| Obesity prevention incorporated into existing CACFP training | No Connecticut is exploring options for CACFP training | 23 states include obesity prevention in training for ECE providers who participate in CACFP |
| Quality Rating and Improvement Systems incorporate obesity prevention standards | No QRIS System (as of 2014) Connecticut is currently developing a Quality Improvement System (QIS) | 29 of 39 states with QRIS in place have included obesity prevention topics in their QRIS standards |
| Availability of online professional development training | No (as of 2014) Connecticut is exploring options for online training | 42 states offer online ECE professional development training related to obesity prevention |

Connecticut State Agencies Making Progress

Since 2014, Connecticut state agencies have started to address early childhood nutrition through licensing and training. The State is currently in the process of reviewing Early Childhood Education (ECE) licensing regulations, and has developed general training for some early childhood providers on nutrition and fitness. Additionally, the Department of Public Health offers training to ECE providers via funding through the Centers for Disease Control and is working with the Connecticut State Department of Education (SDE), Office of Early Childhood (OEC), and the UConn Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity to enhance professional development training focused on obesity prevention.

Despite this progress, more needs to be done to catch up with other states and reduce obesity rates among young children. The current development of Connecticut’s QIS system offers opportunities to incorporate more obesity prevention standards. Connecticut can also improve WIC outreach to parents and caregivers in order to promote breastfeeding, effective infant feeding and sleeping patterns in the first year, and nutrition. Connecticut must look at best practice standards related to early childhood obesity prevention and do better for our children to ensure that they grow at a healthy weight.

For more information, read [Ensuring Young Children Grow Up at a Healthy Weight: Policy Opportunities to Prevent Obesity](#), visit www.chdi.org or contact Abby Alter (aalter@uchc.edu).