



**COMBATING OBESITY  
THROUGH NUTRITION EDUCATION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

***PROMISING PRACTICES FROM CALIFORNIA'S FOOD BANKS  
FOR COMMUNITY LEADERS AND NUTRITION EDUCATORS***

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CALIFORNIA WORKING FAMILIES POLICY SUMMIT  
JANUARY 18, 2007

□ **Education Needs to Go Beyond the Individual.**

So many of the people most affected by the negative health impacts of a poor diet and lack of medical coverage to address these impacts do not have the ability to change their own diets because they rely on others for the food they consume. Nutrition education must be delivered to decision makers in your communities, many of them low-income themselves. The soup kitchen coordinator, the summer lunch site manager, the food pantry volunteer, the child care provider, parents, grandparents, the drug rehab counselor and others in similar positions all have the ability to combat obesity by the decisions they make about what others under their care eat. Be sure to include these decision makers in your education efforts.

□ **Support Nutrition Education Efforts by Making Certain People Have Access.**

If people in your community do not have the ability to make changes in their nutritional habits due to lack of money or access to healthy food options or poor participation or facilitation of government food programs, they will be unable to act on the information that you have provided. Offer resources for people in your community to learn about and apply for the Food Stamp Program, School Breakfast and Lunch Programs, Summer Lunch Program, Emergency Food Assistance Program and other food bank or local food assistance programs. Consider supporting greater food security projects that will give people more options for healthy food choices and participate in legislative and administrative advocacy to improve and expand government nutrition programs so that they are more equipped to meet the need in your community.

□ **Give People the Tools They Need.**

A new kind of nutrition education has been taking hold at California's Food Banks. This education is linked to CAFB's new Farm to Family Program and other Food Bank programs developed to increase the amount of fruits and vegetables available to low-income Californians. At these new produce distributions, low-income Californians get free, locally grown fruits and vegetables delivered with nutrition education and safe food-preparation messages. For some, California grown fresh produce is exotic and unfamiliar. Without education and food preparation messages, some of the produce distributed through these new venues would likely go to waste. Likewise, a nutrition education curriculum that delivers healthy culinary advice, without offering samples for people to experiment with, is equally doomed to failure. By combining nutrition education with free produce programs, CAFB expects that people will be more likely to feel successful about their efforts to integrate more locally grown fruits and vegetables into their diets and be willing to take a chance that they could not otherwise economically afford. Once people become familiar with the produce and how to serve it, they are more likely to purchase it with their own limited food dollars.

□ **Find the Right Time to Talk to People About Food and Nutrition.**

While people are thinking a lot about food and nutrition these days, nutrition education is best delivered when the conversation is initiated by the client. This happens a thousand times a day at local agencies that make up a network of food banks and emergency food providers in California. When someone calls or walks into a food bank or a food bank member agency, they say, “I don’t have enough food.” This offers a perfect teaching opportunity to talk to clients about their overall nutrition. Health providers and rehabilitation counselors find that they are similarly qualified to bring up diet and nutrition when a client initiates a dialog about health or recovery. Develop ways in which your education efforts can appear to be initiated by the target population and you’ll be more successful in gaining their confidence and attention.

□ **As With All Education – Cultural Competency Matters.**

It is difficult to deliver a successful nutrition education message without an understanding of how nutrition and food is approached culturally within your target population. Therefore, it is important to find ambassadors of nutrition within target population communities. Consider hiring paraprofessionals, interns from the local college or university, or developing peer-to-peer educational models. Don’t get too preoccupied with finding an educator that has a degree in nutrition, as some of the best educators do not. California has a strong network of support and many easy-to-find materials to help you deliver appropriate nutrition education messages.