



Framing Messages Regarding Healthy Eating

State and local decision-makers play an important role in supporting healthy eating strategies where people live, learn, work, and play. The information in this guide provides recommendations to help state and local public health reframe messaging related to evidence-based approaches that will resonate with values of decision-makers. Recommendations are based on a qualitative analysis that included a literature review, key informant interviews, and focus groups conducted by the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors.

Define and reframe obesity as it relates to healthy eating policy

Focus on lack of access to healthy foods and its impact on obesity. A barrier to gaining support for healthy eating policies is the perception that obesity is entirely the product of personal choice. Both the literature review and key informants identified that a significant predictor for healthy eating is the availability and access to affordable healthy food. Food service guidelines and the type of food available in retail markets

have the potential to significantly expand food choices and, ultimately, to increase healthy eating.

Discuss appropriate expectations for reductions in obesity-related chronic disease and associated costs, including intermediate measures of success.

Legislators want more substantial results regarding obesity reduction rates than states are currently reporting. Because it is unrealistic to assume that healthy eating policies will result in significant reductions in obesity rates within a short period of time, use specific examples that are cited in the literature to discuss the importance of changing the food environment to encourage healthy eating.

Explain that policy and environmental changes are more impactful than individual approaches.

Obesity is influenced by multiple determinants that require intervention and prevention strategies at both individual and environmental levels. The literature tells us that related contextual features can dramatically influence a person's actions, thus, altering environments may be an effective driver of individual behavior change. For example, discuss how farmers markets offer an access point for fresh produce and a market for local growers.



Communicate the economic perspective to demonstrate the value of healthy eating policy

Provide examples of how evidence-based policy approaches for healthy eating will positively impact the economy and community.

Key informants noted that Legislators are particularly interested in policies that have the potential to positively affect business and agriculture in the communities they represent. Because healthy eating policy is typically first introduced and implemented at the local level, use local success stories — such as development of farmers' markets, local grocery stores, community supported agriculture, farm to school, and/or community gardens — to demonstrate potential outcomes for economic benefit from similar state-level policy.

Focus on local data and solutions, rather than national statistics or problems

Use constituent support or stories. The literature review identified constituent needs or opinions as one of the most influential factors for legislators when determining health policy priorities. Key informant interviewees also noted that when legislators and other decision-makers are considering healthy eating policy, personal interest and strong constituent voices are influential. For example, identify constituents who can effectively support the evidence and discuss food service guidelines that have benefitted employees of local worksites. When including data, make sure the data are unbiased, timely, relevant, local when possible, and linked directly to constituents and community stakeholders.

Provide tangible solutions broken down into actionable steps. The literature review, key informants, and focus groups participants said that focusing on the solution, rather than the problem is particularly effective. Discuss how financing to establish local grocery stores in underserved areas can alleviate hunger, increase self-sufficiency through job creation, and increase access to healthy food.

Discuss impact on specific populations of highest interest such as children, youth, and older adults

Discuss the impact of healthy eating policies on hunger and quality of life for your community, especially for children, seniors, and individuals with disabilities.

Key informants noted that legislators tend to be supportive of policies that ensure the health and safety of children, seniors, and individuals with disabilities. Additionally, increased independence of seniors and individuals with disabilities is important to legislators. A healthy diet is key to assuring the health and independence desired by these vulnerable populations.



“Local government is getting more interested in healthy food access issues and they see day to day the impact that low access has on people in their community.”

- State Health
Department Leader

Actions to effectively frame messages about healthy eating policy to decision-makers

I. Consider decision-maker values that relate to healthy living

- Support for the business community, including agriculture's
 - Economic impact of policies on business
 - Potential cost-savings to business
 - Reduced employee absenteeism
 - Reduced employee healthcare and health insurance costs
 - Attracting new businesses and young workers
 - Increased revenues for local businesses
- Support for individual responsibility for healthy behaviors
- Support for policy that reduces Medicaid and other publicly funded healthcare costs for treating and preventing disease.

II. Develop messages that resonate with decision-makers' values

- Discuss the potential economic impact of healthy eating policies on business and agriculture.
- Discuss the impact of healthy eating policies on children's brain development and kindergarten readiness.
- Highlight examples of how healthy eating in schools has increased performance and attention, while lowering behavioral issues.
- Discuss the impact of healthy eating policies on the quality of life and ability of older adults and individuals with disabilities to live independently.
- Discuss the negative impact of hunger on children, older adults, and individuals with disabilities, including increased medical costs and decreased independence.
- Provide specific examples of how obesity and associated chronic diseases are negatively affecting the business community (reduced worker productivity, increased absenteeism, increased healthcare costs, etc.).
- Provide examples of the impact of state programs and funding sources that have shown outcomes to illustrate positive implications for government resources and finances.
- Frame messages around chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease, a higher priority for decision-makers than obesity.
- Discuss how significant reductions in chronic disease rates require a combination of policies that support and promote individual health behaviors over multiple years.
- Discuss how effective local policies can be replicated in other communities and can be used in developing state-level policy.

- Share state and local data rather than national or regional data, when available.
- Share examples of success and/or need from the communities the legislator represents.
- Showcase a comparable state or community that has adopted policies to illustrate the potential impact.
- Use concrete examples to illustrate the decision-makers' role in strengthening healthy eating for children and youth.

III. Use effective messengers

- Strong constituent voices or vocal advocate groups can share examples and success stories.
- Partners can cite examples of how partnerships between the state health agency, healthy eating coalitions, other state agencies (education, agriculture, and social services, etc.), large businesses, chambers of commerce and other advisory or advocacy groups have improved food access and illustrate the “win-win” of such collaborations.
- Schools and businesses can demonstrate their support for healthy eating policies, as legislators consider them to be credible sources of information.
- The governor and current administration can be champions by demonstrating how healthy eating policy can support their agenda.
- Local municipalities can adopt voluntary healthy eating guidelines that, if successful, may be examples for local or state policy.
- Partners who share a common interest in healthy eating and/or hunger issues:
 - Community stakeholders can gather evidence to supplement available data.
 - Hunger coalitions can speak to the challenges of healthy food access.
 - Individuals and professional organizations representing the business and medical communities can advocate for healthy eating policy.
 - Grassroots advocates committed to reducing food disparities.
 - Local government entities with authority to affect healthy eating policy.
 - Local boards of health, city councils, and county commissions can share their stories of successful healthy eating policy initiatives with state decision-makers and to serve as models for state-level policies.
 - State affiliates of national advocacy organizations, such as the American Heart Association and American Cancer Society.

This publication was supported by the Cooperative Agreement Number 5U38OT000225-05, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the Department of Health and Human Services.