



American
Heart
Association®
Learn and Live



CONTACT:

Ian Kennedy, Horizon Foundation, 443-472-3559
Robi Rawl, Sugar Free Kids, 410-274-2156
Gene Ransom, MedChi, 410-539-0872
Michaeline Fedder, AHA, 443-286-9230
Gerald G. Stansbury, NAACP, 410-533-7302

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, February 26, 2014

New Coalition Forms to Fight Childhood Obesity & Teen Diabetes Health Advocates Announce 2014 Legislative Agenda

Annapolis, MD – Together with fellow health advocates and Maryland General Assembly leaders, MedChi, the American Heart Association, the NAACP and the Horizon Foundation today announced the formation of Sugar Free Kids, a new state coalition to reverse the twin epidemics of childhood obesity and teen diabetes, and its legislative agenda for 2014.

With 1 in 3 children classified as overweight or obese in Maryland and almost a quarter of teens being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes nationally, Sugar Free Kids is focused on enacting evidence-based policies to reverse these critical public health problems.

The rise in obesity, diabetes, and other related diseases is strongly linked to excessive consumption of sugary drinks, which contribute more calories and added sugar to Americans' diets than any other source. Research shows that early interventions are critical to instilling healthy habits and maintaining a healthy weight throughout one's life.

"This generation of children is the first that may live shorter lives than their parents, reversing a trend that is as old as civilization," said Nicolette Highsmith Vernick, President and CEO of the Horizon Foundation. "Unhealthy lifestyle habits — in particular, consumption of sugary drinks — are behind this troubling fact, and with our partners at Sugar Free Kids we are working to change the fate of thousands of Maryland children."

"One soda a day increases a child's likelihood of being overweight by 55% and an adult's by 27%. Drinking one to two sweetened beverages a day increases diabetes risk by 26%," remarked Dr. Brian Avin, immediate past president of MedChi. "The obesity rate in children has tripled and the incidence of diabetes has increased seven fold. The mission of Sugar Free Kids is to reverse this trend by replacing sweetened sugary beverages with healthy beverages."

The coalition is supporting two bills currently before the Maryland General Assembly that address key contributors to these epidemics.

The first piece of legislation, "Child Care Centers – Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Act" (HB 1276, SB 716), would implement improved health standards in child care centers requiring them to serve

healthier drinks to children in their care, better support mothers who are breastfeeding, and reduce non-educational screen time.

The second bill, “Food Service Facilities – Meals for Children” (HB 1255, SB 750), would require restaurants to serve healthy beverage items (e.g., bottled water and low-fat or no-fat milk) as part of their bundled kids’ meal price but would preserve a parent’s ability to separately purchase an unhealthy option for their children if they wish.

“Coronary artery disease begins in childhood and, according to American Heart Association research, the plaques that will stay with us for life have formed by the time a child has become a teenager,” said Michaeline Fedder, Director of Government Relations for the American Heart Association — Mid-Atlantic Affiliate. “It makes sense, therefore that the time to learn healthy behaviors is in early childhood, and child care centers are ideal venues in which healthy habits can be formed and reinforced.”

Statistics also show that minority and low-income children are disproportionately affected by obesity and diabetes, and the toll these problems take on children and their families, not to mention the nation as a whole, is immense. Psychologically, children and adolescents who are obese or overweight are targets of early and systematic social discrimination, leading to low self-esteem, which can hinder academic and social growth and functioning. Physically, it has been proven that obese young people have an 80 percent chance of being obese adults and are more likely than children of average weight to become significantly overweight or obese adults, and therefore more at risk for associated adult health problems.

“For all these reasons and more, the Maryland NAACP is mobilizing its forces to advocate for policies that reduce childhood obesity and improve health for the children from communities of color across our state,” said Isazetta A Spikes, Health Chair of the NAACP Maryland State Conference. “The time is to act is now!”

###

About the American Heart Association:

The American Heart Association is devoted to saving people from heart disease and stroke – America’s No. 1 and No. 4 killers. We team with millions of volunteers to fund innovative research, fight for stronger public health policies, and provide lifesaving tools and information to prevent and treat these diseases. The Dallas-based association is the nation’s oldest and largest voluntary organization dedicated to fighting heart disease and stroke. To learn more or to get involved, call 1-800-AHA-USA1, visit heart.org or call any of our offices around the country.

About the Horizon Foundation:

The Horizon Foundation is an independent philanthropy dedicated to improving the health and wellness of people living or working in Howard County, Maryland. We invest in strategic grants and initiatives to achieve the greatest impact. We also build partnerships and advocate for public policy changes that advance our mission. For more information, visit www.thehorizonfoundation.org.

About MedChi:

MedChi, The Maryland State Medical Society, is a non-profit membership association of Maryland physicians. It is the largest physician organization in Maryland. The mission of MedChi is to serve as Maryland’s foremost advocate and resource for physicians, their patients and the public health of Maryland. For more information, please visit www.medchi.org.

About the NAACP:

Founded in 1909, the NAACP is the nation’s oldest and largest nonpartisan civil rights organization. Its members throughout the United States and the world are the premier advocates for civil rights in their communities.