

Statement

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Effective Strategies to Increase Children's Fruit and Vegetable Consumption: Benefits of Fruit and Vegetable Bars

I am Harvinder Sareen, Director of Clinical Programs and the lead for childhood obesity initiatives at Anthem Blue Cross. Thank you for this opportunity to share with you our research on fruit and vegetable bars in Title 1 schools in Los Angeles Unified School District.

WellPoint's Childhood Obesity Initiative

WellPoint's mission is entrenched in public health – *to improve the lives of people we serve and the health of our communities*. We've taken a public health approach to address the childhood obesity epidemic because we recognized very early on that solutions depend not only on the effective delivery of care by the medical system, but also on complementary changes in schools and communities. Changing children's environments are a key part of our initiative to address childhood obesity in addition to primary care, public-private partnerships, and innovation.

Three Key Points:

1. CHANGES IN CHILDREN'S ENVIRONMENTS ARE CRITICAL

In order to address the childhood obesity epidemic we need to reach children where they live, play, eat, and learn. This is critically important to reducing childhood obesity. Schools are a strategic venue for improving children's health through education, environmental changes, and encouraging the early onset of healthy eating and exercise habits. The goal is to make healthy choices in schools the easy choice.

2. FRUIT AND VEGETABLE BARS IN SCHOOLS ARE EFFECTIVE

Our study on Fruit/Vegetable Bars resulted in increased fruit and vegetable consumption among elementary school children.

- Partnership between: Anthem Blue Cross (a subsidiary of WellPoint, Inc), University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD).
- Research indicates that fruit and vegetable intake has an impact on weight. However, almost two-thirds of children do not meet the recommended fruit and vegetable intake.

- Primary objective: To evaluate the effectiveness of a multi-component intervention to increase fruit and vegetable consumption among low-income elementary school children.
- Intervention – Fruit/Vegetable Bars in school cafeterias, Point of decision prompts (e.g. posters), and Nutrition education in the classroom
- Eight Title 1 LAUSD elementary schools; 4 intervention and 4 control schools
- Predominantly low-income ethnic minority (Latino) children
- Evaluation data included 241 intervention students and 168 control students
- Equipment for the Fruit/Vegetable Bars was donated to each of the 8 schools by WellPoint
- Results:
 - Increased nutrition knowledge associated with use of nutrition curriculum
 - Increased availability and access to wide variety of fruits and vegetables
 - Increased access to fruit resulted in increased consumption of fruit
 - Decreased consumption of French Fries and potato chips
 - Increased participation in the school lunch program

3. POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR 2010 CHILD NUTRITION ACT TO IMPROVE PUBLIC HEALTH

Fruit/Vegetable Bars in school cafeterias, along with nutrition education, and point-of-decision prompts, improve the diets of low-income children:

- These findings have policy implications – we need to have a national policy in place to ensure that all schools have Fruit/Vegetable Bars and that irrespective of their circumstances each child will have guaranteed access to fresh fruit and vegetables.
- Ensure that schools have funds to purchase Fruit/Vegetable Bars and other need cafeteria equipment.
- Ensure that expertise is shared, knowledge is disseminated, and early champions are identified.
- The evidence is in front of us – it can be found in the statistically significant results of our study and it can be found in the big smiles on the faces of the children their plates piled high with fruits and vegetables.
- And the time is now....every day is another missed opportunity