

CDC FUNDING IN ACTION

NEW MEXICO EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION CENTERS BOOST WELLNESS

Wellness Policies Promote Healthy Foods and Physical Activity for Kids



Challenge

According to the New Mexico Childhood Obesity Update: 2015, more than 25% of kindergarteners are overweight or obese when they begin elementary school in New Mexico. Early intervention in obesity prevention can help reduce these numbers. However, teachers, staff, and families in ECEs need technical support, resources, and education about best practices to implement changes. There are approximately 260 licensed child care and Head Start centers in the state of New Mexico. Approximately 43,000 children attend preschool and early child care centers each weekday. Putting into place wellness practices in these centers can greatly increase student exposure to better health habits.



Approach

CYFD and NMDOH created and developed the Healthy Kids, Healthy Childcare Initiative. The initiative supports child care providers in establishing and implementing childcare wellness policies within their ECEs. These wellness policies are written plans that are incorporated into existing family and staff handbooks and serve as a guide for day-to-day practices and procedures that support healthy eating, physical activity, breast feeding, staff wellness, and family engagement. To help ECE staff put these policies into action, NMDOH provides resources, consultations, site visits, and workshops that give staff the opportunity to earn their required continuing education units.



Results

More than 160 ECEs in New Mexico are developing or implementing wellness policies as part of the Healthy Kids Healthy Childcare initiative. Changes include replacing sugary drinks with water or skim milk and serving family-style meals with more fruits and vegetables. Nutrition education for staff, children, and families has led to specific guidelines for food brought from home. In many ECEs, opportunities for physical activity have increased to 2 hours a day—including 60 minutes of structured play and 60 minutes of unstructured play. While many centers were already carrying out several best practices, drafting a wellness policy helps ensure those practices are sustained and shared with families. Although most centers are in urban areas, 55 of the centers are in rural areas of New Mexico.



At A Glance

More than 160 Early Care and Education Centers (ECEs) in New Mexico put into place wellness policies that increase opportunities for physical activity, improve nutrition and breastfeeding practices, and encourage staff wellness and family engagement. The New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) and the New Mexico Children, Youth, and Families Department (CYFD) partnered to create the Healthy Kids, Healthy Childcare Initiative. The initiative provides free training, resources, technical support, and continuing education credit workshops to ECEs.

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