



# Addressing Obesity in the United States

## Background

Over the past 60 years, the number of Americans classified as obese or overweight has trended upward. In the 1960s, roughly 13% of the United States population was classified as obese; however, according to the most recent NHANES report, the prevalence of obesity has ballooned to 41.9%. In addition, the data suggest that nearly 70% of the American population is classified as overweight. Alarming, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that 14.7 million children, almost 20%, are now considered obese. This rise in obesity has been associated with many chronic health conditions, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes, asthma, sleep apnea and joint problems, resulting in an estimated health care cost of \$173 billion annually.

## Support for Physical Activity to Fight Obesity

Addressing the obesity epidemic has no single or simple solution and will require a multi-pronged approach to address the depth and breadth of needs of the American population. However, many associations, including the American College of Sports Medicine® (ACSM), American Medical Association, American Heart Association and American Academy of Family Physicians have recommended that physical activity play a key component of the weight management strategy. In this respect, the lack of activity in the U.S. has become a major health care burden. The CDC reports that 50% of adults and 77% of high school students are not meeting recommended physical activity targets and a combined 25.3% of both populations are inactive. As such, a comprehensive plan that includes cooperation between national, state and local governments along with industry is needed to address the obesity epidemic, increase physical activity and reduce health care costs associated with related chronic diseases. The CDC's Active People Active Nation addresses many strategies of the multi-pronged approach to address obesity and physical inactivity, including the need for:

- Community design for physical activity
- Access to places for physical activity
- School and youth activity programs
- Community-wide campaigns
- Developing social and individual supports
- Education/prompts to encourage physical activity

Government and policy leaders at all levels can support the inclusion of physical activity as a tool and interventional strategy to address the obesity epidemic by:

- Backing the Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) grant program (CFDA 84.424A) under Title IV, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which would go a long way to ensure that well-funded physical education programs improve our national health and our physical readiness for global threats to national security.
- Sponsoring other legislation, including the Personal Health Investment Today (PHIT) Act, which will increase activity through tax incentives.
- Supporting the Promoting Physical Activity for Americans Act, which will benefit Americans with a regular report to guide physical activity efforts and help fight the growing obesity epidemic.

The above legislation has growing bipartisan support.

## ACSM Position

As a leading organization dedicated to advancing health through science, education and medicine, the American College of Sports Medicine® (ACSM) recognize the urgent need to address the obesity epidemic, which poses significant health risks to millions of Americans. By addressing obesity through comprehensive legislation, we can significantly reduce the prevalence of related chronic diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease and certain cancers. ACSM is committed to advocating for policies that improve public health and enhance quality of life.