

MASSACHUSETTS

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The state report is a resource to inform donors and funders about the local context of social issues affecting at-risk populations. This analysis can be used to better understand current local trends and the unique social and economic situation in which the

social issue exists. The information below complements the social issue report and the guide to giving by drawing attention to local initiatives related to the social issue.

FACTS: CHILDHOOD OBESITY PREVENTION IN MASSACHUSETTS

Overall annual healthcare costs related to obesity in Massachusetts¹

nearly \$15 billion
2002

Percentage of Massachusetts youth watching three or more hours of television on an average school day²

30%
2009

Percentage of Massachusetts youth drinking non-diet soda at least once a day³

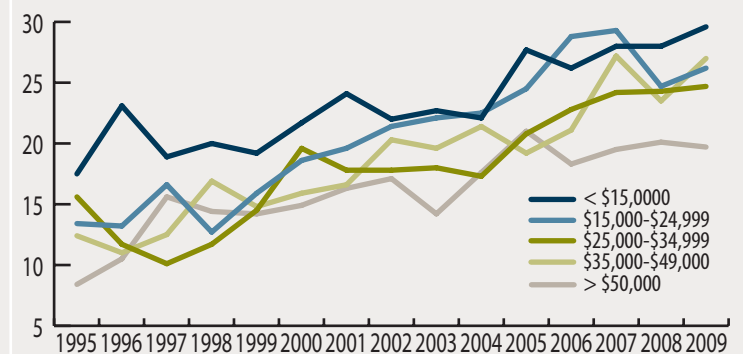
25%
2009

SOCIAL ISSUE INDICATORS

A strong correlation exists between childhood and adult obesity; lower adult obesity rates are a key indicator of success in childhood obesity prevention. Obesity is defined by body mass index (BMI), a measure of a person's weight in relation to his or her height. Because BMI does not account for body fat versus lean muscle mass, it is not a perfect measurement, and it often results in controversy regarding medical diagnosis. Still, using BMI to measure obesity for both children and adults is the most common system used.

As seen in the graph to the right, while obesity rates are consistently rising across all income levels, those with lower incomes are particularly affected. There are many reasons for this disparity; for example, low-income communities tend to have fewer resources to address the barriers to healthy habits and are therefore more likely to be obese.

ADULT OBESITY RATES IN MASSACHUSETTS BY INCOME 1995-2009⁴



WHAT'S HAPPENING IN MASSACHUSETTS

In 2009, more than half of adults and almost one-third of middle and high school students in Massachusetts were either overweight or obese. Additionally, at younger ages, increasing rates of obesity are also being observed, especially for high-risk populations, such as ethnic minorities or low-income households.⁵ If the trend of obesity described above is not stemmed and reversed, it is likely that today's youth will face even higher medical, social, and economic costs than what we currently experience.

The following are key developments in Massachusetts aimed at encouraging healthy living and preventing children from becoming overweight or obese.

- **Healthy People/Healthy Economy** coalition was launched in the fall of 2010 with the goals of making Massachusetts the national leader in health and wellness and safeguarding the Commonwealth's health, fiscal stability, and economic

competitiveness from the costs associated with the rise of obesity and its associated preventable chronic illnesses. The Boston Foundation and the National Network for Health Innovation (NEHI) spearhead the coalition with support from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and other statewide partners. This landmark initiative recognizes that state governments, schools, municipalities, healthcare payers, employers, the food industry, physicians, philanthropies, and the media all play roles in accomplishing four key goals: expanding physical activity, increasing access to healthy foods, creating incentives for health and wellness, and encouraging citizen education and engagement. Benchmarks for success include: an increase in access to bike lanes, an increase in the number of farmers' markets, the use of payment incentives that further support healthy lifestyles of payers and employers, and menu labeling with nutritional information in all restaurants.⁶

- **Mass in Motion** was launched by Governor Deval Patrick’s administration in 2009 as one of the state’s main efforts to combat obesity. It aims to prevent people from becoming overweight or obese and to reduce chronic disease, with emphasis on healthy eating and physical activity. Specific components include:⁷
 - A Community Wellness Grant program serving 33 Massachusetts communities
 - Working on Wellness, which provides small and medium-sized employers with work site wellness resources⁸
 - A requirement that agencies with state contracts provide food services that meet nutrition guidelines, which are based on the 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*⁹
 - A mandate that requires restaurant chains to display calorie counts on all menu boards, including drive-through menus, making it the most stringent requirement in the U.S.
 - Regulations requiring the calculation of and reporting on BMI measurements on school report cards in grades one, four, seven, and ten¹⁰

- **Healthy Choices** is a public school-based physical activity and nutrition program. A collaboration between the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, it reaches approximately 75,000 youth in over 110 public middle schools. It includes:¹¹
 - “Planet Health” curriculum, which integrates nutrition and physical activity into core academic subjects
 - Assessment of school environment for nutrition and physical activity, as well as subsequent improvements in the school environment
 - School-wide activities reinforcing the message of “5-2-1”; five fruits and vegetables a day, two hours of screen time maximum, and at least one hour of physical activity daily

Across Massachusetts, local initiatives are also beginning to address this issue. One example is **Shape Up Somerville**, which began as an intervention research project in partnership with Tufts University. It was embraced by the city of Somerville as a comprehensive approach to combating obesity and raising quality of life. The initiative involves school nutrition interventions, changes in the built environment, reduction of portion sizes in local restaurants, and monthly community celebrations of Walk/Ride Days.¹²

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

ORGANIZATION

Alliance for a Healthier Generation

The Massachusetts Office of Health and Human Services

The National Network for Health Innovation

WEBSITE

www.healthiergeneration.org

www.mass.gov/massinmotion

www.nehi.net

ABOUT SOCIAL IMPACT RESEARCH

Social Impact Research (SIR) is the independent research department of Root Cause, a research and consulting firm dedicated to mobilizing the nonprofit, public, and business sectors to work together in a new social impact market. SIR aggregates, analyzes, and disseminates information to help donors and funders identify and support the most effective,

efficient, and sustainable organizations working to solve social problems. Modeled after private sector equity research firms, SIR produces research reports, analyzes philanthropic portfolios, and provides educational services for advisors to help their clients make effective and rigorous philanthropic decisions.

ENDNOTES

1. “Mass in Motion: A Call to Action,” Massachusetts Department of Health (2008), http://www.mass.gov/Eeohhs2/docs/dph/mass_in_motion/action_plan.pdf.
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3. “Overweight and Obesity: Massachusetts,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/stateprograms/fundedstates/massachusetts.html>.
4. “Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Database,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed Apr. 7, 2011, <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/brfss/income.asp?cat=OB&yr=2009&qkey=4409&state=MA>. Graph generated by SIR.
5. “The Health of Massachusetts: Impact of Overweight and Obesity (1998-2007),” Mass in Motion, Massachusetts Department of Health (2009).
6. “Coalition Goals,” Healthy People/Healthy Economies, The Boston Foundation, <http://bostonfoundation.org/subsites/content.aspx?ID=16136>.
7. “Mass in Motion: Addressing the Public Health Crisis of Overweight and Obesity in Massachusetts,” Massachusetts Department of Health (2008), <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/stateprograms/fundedstates/massachusetts.html>.
8. Servais, Susan, “Workplace Efforts,” *The Boston Globe* (Jan. 13, 2009).
9. “Executive Order 509: Establishing Nutrition Standards for Food Purchased and Served by State Agencies,” Mass in Motion, Massachusetts Department of Health (2009), http://www.mass.gov/Eeohhs2/docs/dph/com_health/nutrition_phys_activity/eo509_qa.pdf.
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11. “Healthy Choices,” Massachusetts Partnership for Healthy Weight, accessed Apr. 6, 2011, http://www.mphw.org/partners_initiatives/schools_initiatives/Healthy_Choices.htm.
12. “Shape Up Somerville,” City of Somerville, accessed Mar. 28, 2011, <http://www.somervillema.gov/Division.cfm?orgunit=SUS>.