



## HIGH-IMPACT GIVING Philanthropy That Makes a Difference OPPORTUNITIES

CHILDHOOD OBESITY:

# Increasing Impact through Early Engagement

*Donors today have an important opportunity to address childhood obesity by supporting programs that help very young children. While school-based obesity prevention programs have received much recent attention, a growing body of research suggests that efforts to impact younger children can have even longer-lasting benefits. By helping service providers improve nutrition and physical activity levels in early education and childcare settings, as well as by supporting families with young children, donors can play a key role in addressing and even preventing childhood obesity.*



### Recent High-Impact Giving Opportunities:

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### Related High-Impact Giving Opportunities:

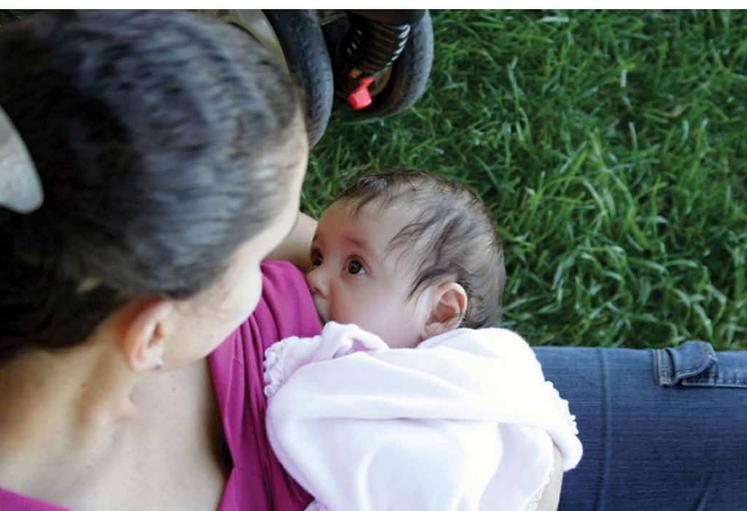
**Health:** Improving Access to Dental Care for Low-Income Children

**Global Health:** Shining the Spotlight on Neglected Tropical Diseases

**FACT: One in every three U.S. children is overweight or obese.  
Over half of obese children become overweight at or before age two.<sup>1</sup>**

## WHY NOW?

Donors can leverage national attention on childhood obesity by focusing on younger children. A growing body of research shows that impacting children at a young age is likely to have significant benefits down the road, and growing rates of obesity make immediate action critical.



## THE CHALLENGE

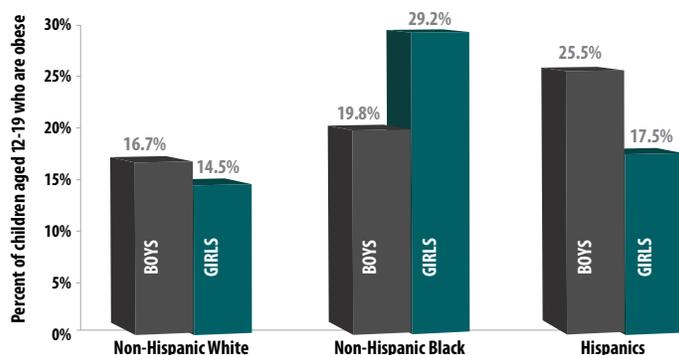
Currently, more than 10 percent of U.S. two- to five-year-olds is obese, double the percentage from 30 years ago, and recent studies show that many toddlers don't eat a single daily serving of fruits or vegetables.<sup>2</sup> Yet despite high-profile recent efforts to fight obesity among school-aged children, few funders currently focus specifically on improving nutrition and addressing obesity in early childhood—during the formative preschool years when many long-term eating and exercise habits take shape.

The challenges literally begin at birth. Consistent breastfeeding has been linked to both healthier eating habits in childhood and to lower rates of obesity, yet breastfeeding rates remain far below national recommendations. Rates are especially low among black and Hispanic children, who also have more rapid weight gain in infancy—a factor contributing to obesity later in life.<sup>3</sup>

The challenges also disproportionately affect poor children. The obesity rate among preschoolers from low-income homes is nearly 15 percent, and among some Native American populations, it is greater than 20 percent. Ensuring that all families and childcare providers have the information and support they need to promote proper nutrition from an early age is critical.

Also critical is the quality of meals, snacks, and exercise programs provided in early childcare settings, where over 60 percent of U.S. children between three and five are enrolled.<sup>4</sup> About 3.2 million young children from low-income homes receive meals in such settings through the federal Child and Adult Food Care Program (CACFP).<sup>5</sup> Efforts to improve the quality of those meals are underway, but significant improvements at the federal level are likely many years off. Meanwhile, opportunities to improve nutritional and physical activity standards at the state level abound.

### Childhood Obesity Rates by Race, Ethnicity, and Gender, 2007-08



Source: CDC, National Center for Health Statistics, National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey;  
Note: Obesity is defined as BMI  $\geq$  gender- and weight-specific 95th percentile from the 2000 CDC Growth Charts

1. <http://www.letsmove.gov/obesitytaskforce.php>

2. [http://medical.gerber.com/nirf/cm2/upload/20446F1F-6EB9-4D23-9151-759BC6F598B3/2385\\_FITS08-PrelimFind-FINALv2-05.pdf](http://medical.gerber.com/nirf/cm2/upload/20446F1F-6EB9-4D23-9151-759BC6F598B3/2385_FITS08-PrelimFind-FINALv2-05.pdf)

3. <http://www.rwjf.org/humancapital/product.jsp?id=56331>

4. [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d09/tables/dt09\\_043.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d09/tables/dt09_043.asp)

## THE OPPORTUNITIES

### Promote childcare licensing guidelines that strengthen obesity prevention efforts.

Many states lack adequate childcare licensing guidelines and oversight. By supporting improved guidelines, such as policies promoting healthy foods and requiring minimum amounts of physical activity, donors can promote healthier habits among young children in childcare programs across their states. A number of states are already making strides in setting stronger childcare policies. Thanks partly to the efforts of the Nemours Foundation, Delaware recently became the first U.S. state to develop comprehensive guidelines around nutrition and physical activity for childcare programs.<sup>6</sup>

### Engage with childcare providers to improve nutrition programs and training.

Donors can reach out to local childcare centers or consortia to determine what resources are needed to promote healthier childcare environments. Support may include funding for programs providing guidance on healthy meal planning, appropriate physical activity and play space for small children, limiting TV and other screen time, or purchasing healthy foods. A list of helpful programs and toolkits can be found in the “Additional Resources” section below. Donors can also support efforts to train more frontline childcare providers in adopting and implementing meal plan and physical activity programs.

### Support programs and policies that encourage breastfeeding.

By supporting hospital-based programs, such as the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative, donors can help educate and empower mothers to initiate and continue breastfeeding. Additionally, donors can support legislation and advocacy efforts to promote breastfeeding in the workplace, so that more mothers can provide breast milk to their babies during the critical early months of life.

### Help at-risk families ensure good nutrition and fitness for their children.

Funding programs that provide educational resources on nutrition and physical activity to expectant mothers and families can help prevent obesity early in life, especially among at-risk populations. Donors can work with intermediaries, such as Head Start service providers, that already deliver educational resources to low-income families with young children. They can also support or replicate programs like “text4baby,” a partnership between funders, nonprofits, government agencies and corporations that provides expectant and new mothers with text messages that include tips on good nutrition, physical activity, and breastfeeding.<sup>7</sup>

<b>GRAINS</b> Make half your grains whole	<b>VEGETABLES</b> Vary your veggies	<b>FRUITS</b> Focus on fruits	<b>MILK</b> Get your calcium-rich foods	<b>MEAT &amp; BEANS</b> Go lean with protein
Eat at least 3 oz. of whole-grain cereals, breads, crackers, rice, or pasta every day <sup>8</sup>  1 oz. is about 1 slice of bread, about 1 cup of breakfast cereal, or 1/2 cup of cooked rice, cereal, or pasta	Eat more dark-green veggies like broccoli, spinach, and other dark leafy greens  Eat more orange vegetables like carrots and sweetpotatoes  Eat more dry beans and peas like pinto beans, kidney beans, and lentils	Eat a variety of fruit  Choose fresh, frozen, canned, or dried fruit  Go easy on fruit juices	Go low-fat or fat-free when you choose milk, yogurt, and other milk products  If you don't or can't consume milk, choose lactose-free products or other calcium sources such as fortified foods and beverages	Choose low-fat or lean meats and poultry  Bake it, broil it, or grill it  Vary your protein routine — choose more fish, beans, peas, nuts, and seeds

5. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/care/cacfp/aboutcacfp.htm>

6. <http://www.altarum.org/research-initiatives-health-systems-health-care/improving-human-health-systems-mission-projects/delaware-exec-summary>

7. <http://www.text4baby.org/about.html>

8. Amount varies based on child's age, size, and activity level. See <http://www.mypyramid.gov/preschoolers/Plan/index.html>



## Additional Resources

- ***Childhood Nutrition in the United States***, an Arabella Advisors Issue Brief co-authored by Jasmine N. Hall Ratliff of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, explores strategies donors can employ to help improve child nutrition in the communities they support. [http://www.arabellaadvisors.com/images/IB\\_files/ChildNutrition.pdf](http://www.arabellaadvisors.com/images/IB_files/ChildNutrition.pdf)
- ***Preventing Child Obesity in Early Care and Education Programs***, by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Public Health Association and the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Early Childhood Education, describes evidence-based best practices in nutrition, physical activity, and screen time. [http://nrckids.org/CFOC3/PDFVersion/preventing\\_obesity.pdf](http://nrckids.org/CFOC3/PDFVersion/preventing_obesity.pdf)

Several programs offer guidance and resources for childcare providers:

- ***I Am Moving, I Am Learning (IMIL)***, by Head Start, offers curricula and provider trainings to promote healthier eating and increased physical activity. <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/ecdh/Health/Nutrition/Nutrition%20Program%20Staff/IMIL/IamMovingIam.html>
- ***Color Me Healthy***, from the North Carolina Division of Public Health, aims to use color, music and exploration of the senses to teach young children healthy habits. <http://www.colormehealthy.com/professional/index.html>
- ***The Child and Adult Care Food Program***, implemented by the United States Department of Agriculture, offers resources including sample menus, an infant feeding guide, and healthy recipes. <http://teammnutrition.usda.gov/childcare.html>

**Arabella**  
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## About High-Impact Giving Opportunities

Since 2008, Arabella Advisors has been identifying high-impact giving opportunities to share with the rest of the philanthropy community and with donors everywhere, whether they are able to give \$100, \$100,000 or \$1 million. Our selection criteria require that these opportunities:

- Address urgent needs
- Lack the attention they deserve, and
- Provide donors with the chance to have a significant impact

Until this year, we released our High-Impact Giving Opportunities as an annual list. We are now releasing them individually, to make them more timely and useful.

## About Arabella Advisors

Arabella Advisors is a leading philanthropy services firm supporting the efforts of donors who care deeply about the causes they support and want their contributions to make a measurable difference.

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