



Testimony by Tina Zuk
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Obesity and tobacco are Vermont's biggest *preventable* public health problems and prevention spending is key.

- Chronic diseases like heart disease, stroke and cancer are among the most prevalent and costly to treat – those related to smoking and obesity total \$550 million each year in Vermont alone, \$129 million of which is Medicaid spending.
- Commissioner Chen testified recently that only 3 cents of every dollar spent on health care actually goes to public health and prevention.
- We can't expect the half a billion dollars Vermont is spending annually on chronic diseases to go down by spending the majority of health care dollars just treating them.
- The American Heart Association is asking the Appropriations Committee to:
 - 1) Restore the nearly \$245,000 in proposed cuts to the tobacco control program and find a sustainable source of funding to maintain its effectiveness.
 - 2) Restore the \$300,000 in cuts to CHAMPPS grants obesity prevention funding
 - 3) Support a 2 cent per ounce excise tax on sugary drinks as a means to:
 - Restore existing obesity funding
 - Establish comprehensive obesity prevention measures that provide opportunities for healthy eating and active living in Vermont
 - Provide greater health care access and subsidies for healthy fruits and vegetables to underserved Vermonters
 - Reduce consumption of unhealthy sugary drinks.

Addressing obesity isn't wishful thinking. It's a necessity if Vermont is ever truly going to get health care spending under control.

In a 2014 grant application to the CDC to address chronic diseases and obesity, the Vermont Department of Health said:

Vermont needs to shine the spotlight on obesity the same way it did with the state's opiate problem and address it in a comprehensive way in communities across Vermont.

According to the Vermont Department of Health:

- Over 60% of adults are **overweight** or **obese**
- Nearly one in ten have been diagnosed with **diabetes**
- 29% of Vermont youth are **overweight** or **obese**

Low income Vermonters:

- Have two times the rate of **obesity**
- Are four times more likely to have a **heart attack**
- Are two and a half times more likely to have a **stroke**
- Are three times more likely to have **diabetes**

Of the pregnant women in Vermont:

- 43% are **overweight** or **obese** when they find out they are pregnant

The health department estimated it would cost \$2,000,153 to address obesity through nutrition education, maintaining pedestrian and bike access, community health services, and other actions.

But the Administration's proposed budget **would cut \$300,000** in funding from CHAMPPS obesity prevention community grants.

Funding for the following grantees and fiscal agents would be cut:

- Brattleboro Area Prevention Coalition – Youth Services, Inc.
- The Collaborative – Mt. Communities Supporting Education, Inc. (South Londonderry)
- Community Connections/Central Vermont New Directions – Washington Central Friends of Education
- Deerfield Valley Community Partnership – Windham Southwest Supervisory Union
- Franklin County Caring Communities – Northwest Medical Center
- Lamoille Prevention Coalition -- Lamoille Family Center
- Milton Community Youth Coalition
- Northeast Kingdom Learning Services
- Rutland Area Prevention Coalition – Rutland Community Programs
- Winooski Coalition for a Safe and Peaceful Community.

The following from Northwestern Medical Center is an example of just what the loss of the average \$40,000 in CHAMPPS funding would mean to a community:

- The CHAMPPs funding helps support **Healthy Roots, the emerging exciting initiative in Franklin & Grand Isle counties to keep locally produced healthy foods in the local food system.** A cold storage facility has opened and an additional grant was secured to purchase a refrigerated truck for transport. This promises better access to local healthy food choices as well as a better local economy.
- CHAMPPs funded staffing have helped **develop “Safe Routes to School” efforts in 9 schools impacting hundreds of students** in “Walking School Bus” initiatives and community changes making it safer for students to walk/bike to school. Efforts continue towards making our communities more walkable and bikeable through engaging community members and pursuing grant funds.
- In Swanton, CHAMPPs funded staff are helping the Swanton Enhancement Committee which is working with VT Council on Rural Development to identify the desires of the community and find ways to implement improvements. **A more walkable and bikeable community** was one of the items the community deemed important.
- Fairfield, Fairfax, Alburgh, and Enosburg all have great recreational resources that are underused. CHAMPPs funding is helping to **develop Fairfield Pond beach as a recreation space for the community, to develop the new community center in Fairfax, to find ways to bring the community to the Alburgh Senior Center and Community Center while making the green space adjacent to it an active park, and to support Enosburg’s efforts to create an off-road pedestrian path or sidewalk from the Village to the Recreation Fields.**
- These types of infrastructure improvements make healthier eating and physical activity the community norm in our region, which leads to better health and ultimately, lower healthcare costs due to avoided illness and disease.

We realize your committee competing demands it must balance, but, the projected increase in obesity and related chronic diseases calls for action now.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in its annual State of Obesity Report stated:

- Vermont’s current 38,031 cases of heart disease would climb to 190,617 by 2030 if we continue on our current path, diabetes cases in Vermont would rise from approximately 50,000 to 77,000 cases and over 10,000 cases of obesity related cancer would rise to more than 27,000.
- This is the only thing that might actually make the \$202 million Vermont is currently spending annually on obesity related diseases seem good.