



Governor Schwarzenegger called needed attention to the role government actions play in influencing whether the communities we live in foster healthy eating and physical activity when he ordered the state's Strategic Growth Council to establish a Health in All Policies Task Force at his recent obesity summit. The implications go far beyond obesity. The Public Health Institute (PHI) welcomes this important focus and looks forward to supporting the work of the task force and providing specific recommendations to ensure the success of this promising strategy.

Health in all policies is an approach that looks at all public- and private-sector policy making through a health lens, with the objective of promoting and protecting the health of the population by addressing the social and physical environment influences on health. To be effective, it is critical that health in all policies be adopted not just by the state but by the federal government as well. To this end, PHI also applauds First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move initiative, which is designed to eliminate childhood obesity within a generation, and recommends that health in all policies become a central tenet of that campaign, too.

"Health in all policies requires that we fundamentally rethink the way that decisions are made and put health at the heart of the public policy process," said Mary A. Pittman, DrPH, president and CEO of PHI. "This means integrating consideration of health impacts into physical environment decisions, such as land use, housing and air quality, as well as decisions concerning the economic and social environment, including education, social services and tax policy. We all know that good health is as vital to California's economic success as it is to our individual well-being. For this reason, we urge the state to move beyond a narrow focus on only those issues that impact the physical environment and to incorporate health in all policies into the work of all state agencies."

By taking this bold strategic step to address health in all policies, the state is acting consistently with World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations and principles that are designed to help governments assess the impact of development on health. WHO has urged its member nations to "ensure dialogue and cooperation among relevant sectors with the aim of integrating a consideration of health into relevant public policies and enhancing intersectoral action."

To help inform and shape the work of the Health in All Policies Task Force, and to ensure that health in all policies leads to meaningful change, PHI recommends that the state adopt the WHO principles. In particular, the task force should:

- provide a democratic, open process that encourages public participation;
- consider the distribution of health impacts of a policy across a population, paying specific attention to vulnerable groups, and recommend ways to improve or mitigate health impacts;

- aim for sustainable development that meets today's needs without limiting future generations from meeting theirs;
- evaluate the best evidence from a range of disciplines and provide a transparent, rigorous and impartial process for making recommendations; and
- take into account a wide range of factors from all sectors of society in evaluating a policy or development's potential physical, mental and social impacts.

It is well understood that there is interplay between economic development and the health of the population. While economic development can bring tremendous benefits to a society, without checks there can be grave consequences for people's health, particularly those who are most vulnerable. Therefore, PHI urges that the Health in All Policies Task Force identify measurable goals for achieving healthy, equitable and sustainable growth that promote communities where all individuals can reach their highest potential.

To reflect these goals, PHI recommends that the composition of the task force include representatives from all sectors of government, including education, transportation, housing, environmental protection and social services as well as the business community, public health and health care.

PHI programs, including the Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative, Public Health Law & Policy, the Center for Health Leadership and Practice and the Center for Public Health & Climate Change, are already working to promote use of health in all policies throughout California and the United States. To build on this leadership, PHI will establish a cross-program workgroup to share best practices gleaned from our wealth of expertise and to identify promising programs, policies and strategies that will be submitted to the Health in All Policies Task Force.

Health in all policies is more than simply a catchy slogan. It is a new way of thinking about public policy and a worthy goal that will set California on a path to improving health for everyone.

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