

ISSUE REPORT

# Investing In America's Health:

A STATE-BY-STATE LOOK AT PUBLIC HEALTH  
FUNDING AND KEY HEALTH FACTS



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PREVENTING EPIDEMICS.  
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## PREVENTION IN ACTION

# Ensuring Healthy Habit Development in Child Care

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**T**he state of Alabama ranks second in obesity compared to the other 50 states in the nation, with an adult obesity prevalence rate of 32.3 percent. Obesity is a significant health issue because it contributes to high health care costs and chronic disease development. Prevention should begin during early childhood since obese and overweight children are likely to continue this unhealthy weight gain trend into adulthood. Therefore, improving children's opportunities to develop healthy behaviors during early childhood becomes an important strategy towards mitigating obesity. In Jefferson County, Alabama, child advocacy organizations and businesses and government agencies who understood the importance of facilitating healthy habit development in children, took action.

### Regulations

In 2011, the Jefferson County Department of Health developed and adopted child care health and safety regulations to ensure general wellness for children in Jefferson County. Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR) provides minimum standards for child care centers; however, they are applicable only to licensed centers. In 2007, the Mobile County Department of Health adopted safety standards for children; however, they do not include nutrition and physical activity requirements. JCDH capitalized on the strengths of both DHR's minimum standards and Mobile's safety regulations by developing and adopting regulations that include child health requirements and apply to all child care centers regardless of license status.

For example, Jefferson County's new regulations require that children be provided with opportunities to engage in physical activity with developmentally appropriate equipment; daily physical activity must be included on child care schedules and prominently posted; and screen time must be limited. Meals and snacks served to children must comply with USDA guidelines; water should be made available during meal times; and at least half the grains served each week must be whole grains. Child care centers are also required to receive child care training that was developed to provide child care centers with

ongoing support and education, while assisting with compliance. Other requirements involve employee background checks, safe and hygienic facilities and practices, clean and safe physical structures, clean and well-maintained objects, as well as food service rule adherence. United Way of Central Alabama, Alabama Breast Feeding Coalition, Healthy Child Care, Child Care Resources, Success By 6 and Alabama Department of Human Resources contributed to the process and Mobile's regulations were used as a guide.



### Assessment, Training and Incentives

Success By 6 used the Nutrition and Physical Activity Self Assessment for Child Care (NAP SACC) to assess child care centers and develop nutrition and physical activity improvement plans. Childcare Resources provided child care center staff with tailored physical activity and nutrition training, which provided them with information required to make healthy food and physical activity time available to children. Furthermore, child care centers that exhibited leadership and high need were competitively awarded playground equipment. Playgrounds were built and installed with community and local business volunteers.

### Conclusion

Jefferson County took a comprehensive approach to ensure healthy habit development in children frequenting over 360 child care centers. As a result, the course of a child's day will be positively impacted by required health practices, safe playground facilities, child care training and improvement plans.