

White House Childhood Obesity Task Force's "Action Plan" for "Solving the Problem of Childhood Obesity Within a Generation": Key Areas of Focus for the Conventional Food and Beverage Industry

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On May 11, 2010, the White House Childhood Obesity Task Force submitted a report to President Obama titled, "Solving the Problem of Childhood Obesity Within A Generation." The report was submitted in response to President Obama's February 9, 2010 [Memorandum Establishing a Task Force on Obesity](#), which also requested a "comprehensive interagency plan" for attacking the obesity epidemic from the Task Force within 90 days.

The Task Force report reinforces the authoritative public health recommendations that have developed in the United States since 2001, when Former Surgeon General David Satcher issued the nation's "[Call to Action To Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity](#)," including recommendations made in the Institute of Medicine's reports entitled, "[Action Plan for Obesity Prevention](#)" (2005) and "[Food Marketing to Children and Youth: Threat or Opportunity?](#)" (2005). The Task Force report elaborates upon previous recommendations aimed at fostering a healthy environment for children at school and elsewhere, and extends the range of specific public health intervention strategies considered to include regulation of obesogenic chemical exposures, front-of-package and menu labeling, and various economic incentives (taxes, subsidies, licensing standards) to encourage the marketing of food products that support dietary patterns that meet U.S. Dietary Guidelines standards. In addition, the Task Force report recommends "concrete actionable benchmarks " for marking progress and determining success, and "defines solving the problem of childhood obesity in a generation as returning to a childhood obesity rate of just 5 percent by 2030."

The Task Force's May 11th report provides 70 recommendations for "solving the problem of childhood obesity in a generation," and explains that these recommendations are focused on five key areas, namely:

- **Getting children a healthy start on life**, with good prenatal care for their parents; support for breastfeeding; adherence to limits on "screen time"; and quality child care settings with nutritious food and ample opportunity for young children to be physically active;
- **Empowering parents and caregivers** with simpler, more actionable messages about

nutritional choices based on the latest Dietary Guidelines for Americans; improved labels on food and menus that provide clear information to help make healthy choices for children; reduced marketing of unhealthy products to children; and improved healthy care services, including BMI measurement for all children;

- **Providing healthy foods in schools**, through improvements in federally-supported school lunches and breakfasts; upgrading the nutritional quality of other foods sold in schools; and improving nutrition education and the overall school environment;
- **Improving access to healthy affordable food**, by eliminating “food deserts” in urban and rural America, lowering the relative prices of healthier foods; developing or reformulating food products to be healthier; and reducing the incidence of hunger, which has been linked to obesity; and
- **Getting children more physical active**, through quality physical education, recess, and other opportunities in and after school; addressing aspects of the “built environment” that make it difficult for children to walk or bike safely in their communities; and improving access to safe parks, playgrounds, and indoor and outdoor recreational facilities.

These key areas reflect the “priority areas set forth in the Memorandum, which also form the pillars of the First Lady’s Let’s Move! Campaign.” The Task Force intends to work “in partnership with the First Lady to engage stakeholders across society,” to develop a strategy for implementing the “action plan” outlined in the report.

Twelve federal agencies participate actively in the Task Force, including the Departments of Agriculture, Defense, Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Justice, and Transportation, as well as the Corporation for National and Community Service, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Federal Communications Commission, and the Federal Trade Commission. The Task Force also “received more than 2,500 public comments with specific and creative suggestions” for combating the obesity epidemic.

Many of the Task Force recommendations are consistent with agency efforts already underway, including the **FDA’s Front-of-Pack Labeling Initiative**, forthcoming **FDA guidance documents** regarding nutrient content claims and general nutrition facts labeling, and the **FTC’s efforts regarding food marketing to children**. Some of the Task Force’s school-nutrition related recommendations also may be reflected in amendments **to the federal Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004**, expected to come before Congress reauthorization this year. The bill supports all federal school meal and child nutrition efforts, including the national school lunch and breakfast programs and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC).

In the coming year, federal agencies also are expected to implement the following Task Force recommendations:

- **USDA** and **HHS** will update the Dietary Guidelines and related guidance to provide parents and caregivers with helpful information about nutrition, and work with Congress to pass a child nutrition reauthorization bill that improves food in schools;
- **USDA, Treasury**, and **HHS** will work with Congress to bring grocery stores and other healthy food retailers to underserved areas by supporting more than \$400 million in investments in a Healthy Food Financing Initiative;

- **DOT** and **EPA** will promote walking and biking to school, with a new best practices guide from the DOT-funded National Center for Safe Routes to School and new proposed voluntary “school sitting” guidelines from EPA; and
- Federal agencies will also make funds available to local communities, including \$25 million from **HHS** to support obesity prevention and screening services for children, and \$35 million in physical education program grants to schools from the **Department of Education**, which will also be working with Congress to create a Successful, Safe, and Healthy Students initiative as part of a reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

For information regarding key implications for companies that market food and beverage products, please see our [client advisory](#). A complete list of the Task Force’s recommendations is available [here](#).