



The Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children (CLOCC)

Smith Child Health Research, Outreach and Advocacy Center

Stanley Manne Children's Research Institute

Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago

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May 20, 2019

The Honorable Lori E. Lightfoot
Mayor, City of Chicago
121 N LaSalle Street
Chicago City Hall 4th Floor
Chicago, IL 60602

Dear Mayor Lori Lightfoot:

It is well documented that life expectancy varies in Chicago by race, ethnicity, and geography; three constructs that are inextricably intertwined in our hyper-segregated city where white wealth is concentrated downtown and on the north side and poverty is concentrated on the west and south sides in predominantly Latinx and African American neighborhoods. Chronic diseases are a primary driver of the racial and ethnic disparities in life expectancy across Chicago. Obesity, caused by poor nutrition and lack of physical activity, is a significant risk factor for such prevalent chronic conditions as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and many forms of cancer. Research has shown that childhood obesity can begin before and during pregnancy, that weight gain in the first six months of life is highly predictive of obesity by age 3, and that children who are obese at 5 years of age or much more likely to be obese in adolescence and beyond than children who are at a healthy weight when they enter Kindergarten. In Chicago, the most recently available data on obesity from students in CPS schools (CDPH, 2013) indicate that 20% of children entering Kindergarten, 30% entering 6th grade, and 25% entering 9th grade were obese. In Illinois, adult obesity alone adds \$3.4 billion to annual health care costs, including \$1 billion to Medicaid and \$800 million to Medicare. Chicago shares a large part of obesity prevalence in the state and thus that financial burden. Addressing the many factors that contribute to high rates of obesity in our city should be an important part of a portfolio of strategies designed to address health equity, ensure quality of life for all Chicagoans, and reduce the economic burden of health care in our city.

The Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children (CLOCC) is a nationally-recognized leader for community-based childhood obesity prevention. Based within Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital, we have supported, coordinated, and united thousands of partners to promote healthy and active lifestyles for children and families since 2002. Our focus for 17 years has been to ensure that children and their families are able to eat healthy and be physically active where they live, learn, and play. Our diverse and vast network has developed and implemented evidence-based programs and policies in neighborhoods, schools, childcare, parks, and beyond that support healthy and active living. Even while the strategies have advanced, we have yet to see important reductions in obesity rates. Because of this, CLOCC has begun to expand its focus to more upstream factors that shape families' ability to lead healthy lives and help their children to develop and sustain habits that will protect them from obesity and its harmful consequences. Known as "social determinants," upstream factors such as stable housing, healthy food access, supportive neighborhood infrastructure, fair and consistent immigration policy, and equitable income distribution, built on a foundation of racial equity and social justice are critical to supporting healthy lifestyles for Chicagoans.

In a recent CLOCC meeting, stakeholders identified a series of steps that your administration could take to focus on conditions that shape children's and families' ability to maintain healthy behaviors that will ultimately help curb the tide of obesity and make tangible improvements to the health of Chicago's children and families and reduce health inequity. **These steps would positively impact the direct causes of obesity and the systemic, upstream factors that create unhealthy environments and place significant constraints on nutrition and physical activity.** We would welcome the opportunity to further discuss or clarify these points and how they are connected to chronic disease and more specifically the problem of obesity.

Our Executive Director, Adam Becker, PhD, MPH, can be contacted directly at abbecker@luriechildrens.org.

We wish you a safe and productive service as Mayor.

Sincerely,

The Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children (CLOCC)

ACTION STEPS, as presented by CLOCC, Spring 2019

The City of Chicago, including the Office of the Mayor, City departments, sister agencies, and City Council should:

- Establish an interagency committee on racial equity, with representatives from every department that affects health, safety and quality of life for Chicagoans.
- Continue to support important policy and practice advances in such initiatives and plans as: CDPH's Healthy Chicago 2.0, CPS's Healthy CPS, CDOT's Vision Zero Chicago Action Plan and Complete Streets Chicago Design Guidelines, and the multi-agency Recipe for Healthy Places (Chicago's healthy food access plan).
- Offer free and reduced public transportation to lower income families and youth; enabling them to access the best of what Chicago has to offer.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive transportation plan that engages advocates, experts, and residents and prioritizes pedestrian safety and equity.
- Establish consistent community, transportation, and economic development policies that are not subject to aldermanic prerogative. These policies should include spending oversight, accountability, and transparency at the Ward level and require a participatory budgeting process in every Ward.
- Prioritize bike infrastructure, including racks and protected lanes, at and around schools to encourage students to ride to school.
- Develop an equitable violence prevention plan that ensures that all residents can move safely and confidently throughout their community and across the city.
- Create an equitable affordable housing plan that slows displacement and gentrification in the face of infrastructure improvements, ensures the availability of affordable housing for families of all sizes, and holds developers accountable for current policies and laws
- Protect Chicago's status as a sanctuary city and ensure that immigrant children and families do not respond to fear of federal action by rejecting health and wellness supports to which they are entitled (e.g., public nutrition assistance, health insurance) or by not traveling throughout their communities to access parks, healthy food retail, or after-school programs.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive plan for land use that emphasizes equity and prioritizes health and safety of all Chicagoans.
- Become a trauma-informed city in which all city personnel, agencies, and systems have the capacity to understand better and more effectively serve children and families affected by stress and adversity.

More about CLOCC

CLOCC's mission is to confront the childhood obesity epidemic by promoting healthy and active lifestyles for children throughout the Chicago metropolitan area. The Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children creates and sustains the types of multi-sector collaboration recommended by our nation's health leaders. CLOCC has built a vital, broad-based network of thousands of participants and organizations. We are data-driven and evidence-based, committed to building capacity among our partners. The Institute of Medicine, US Surgeon General, the American Medical Association, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have recognized CLOCC as an outstanding community obesity prevention model. CLOCC's strategies include environmental change, public education, advocacy, research, outcome measurement, and program evaluation. Learn more at CLOCC.net.