

As part of the state's long reaching goal to combat obesity and encourage healthy lifestyles for all, an organization called the Healthy Hawaii Initiative was formed using tobacco settlement money to spearhead a global plan to steer the State of Hawaii in the right direction. Over 5 years ago, a series of focus groups were held representing different areas (community, private health, industry, education, etc) to assist in outlining the goals that the State would look to achieve. The major players included the State Department of Health, Hawaii Department of Education, the Healthy Hawaii Initiative, University of Hawaii, John A Burns School of Medicine, and other private insurers, businesses, and organizations.

Goals: Benchmarks were created to measure the progress made and were specific for age and demographics (rural vs urban areas). Examples of the benchmark categories include: Individuals engaging in regular physical activity, consumption of fruits and vegetables, and % of individuals considered obese.

Progress: The Hawaii Department of Education adopted the USDA Wellness program. Specific changes to the school lunch program include: at least 50% of all starches to be whole grain, limiting the fat content of each school lunch, banning the sale of candy or other minimal nutritional value food from school or school sponsored functions, and limiting the beverages for sale in on-campus vending machines to 100% fruit juice, water or non-low calorie drinks.

Aggressive media campaigns aimed at school-age and adolescent children including Hawaii's 5-2-1-0 campaign (5 fruits/vegetables, limit to 2 hours screen time, 1 hour physical activity, 0 sugared beverages) and most recently, "Rethink your Drink" encouraging water or low calorie beverage consumption.

This year, a bill was introduced to this legislative session that would add a penny per ounce tax on sugar containing beverages. The Hawaii Dietetic Association launched a grassroots effort to support this bill, however, it was just recently tabled, with the plan to re-introduce next year (non-election year).