

QUESTIONING THE CANDIDATES

The state and local elections coming up in November are an opportunity to bring issues of nutrition and physical activity to the forefront. Asking the right questions can highlight these issues and let candidates know that the community cares about their answers. Attached are questions that will help elucidate which candidates are supportive of policies to increase access to healthy food and physical activity.

How to use the questions:

- **Pick one or two key questions to ask at a candidates' forum.** Before asking a question at a forum, know that you are able to summarize the issue and discuss your position and why. When asking about specific legislation, be prepared to summarize the legislation as candidates may not know the particulars you are questioning about.
- **Send a standard list of questions to all candidates.** Let candidates know how you plan to publicize answers broadly to your coalition or community. Answers may be combined with record of how the candidate has treated issues in the past for a candidates' scorecard on nutrition and fitness. Remember that non-profits must offer to provide any info to ALL candidates in order to be nonpartisan.
- **Customize questions to address specific local issues for local elections.** Referring to particular challenges or success stories in your community can help focus the issue locally. For recent statistics on overweight children in your community go to http://www.publichealthadvocacy.org/policy_briefs/overweight2004.html for a clear picture of the extent to which this epidemic affects your Assembly district, city, or county.

BACKGROUND AND KEY STATISTICS

Good nutrition and regular physical activity are fundamental to healthy living. Specifically, poor eating and activity habits are major contributors to cancer, coronary heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, and stroke. Associated with raising rates of obesity and overweight, are an increase in diabetes in adults and the emergence of Type 2 diabetes in children. From 1990 to 1998 there was a 67.4% increase in diabetes among California adults. If current trends continue, 32.8% of boys and 38.5% of girls born in 2000 will develop diabetes.

Skyrocketing rates of diet-related chronic disease provide ample evidence that the current environment does not support healthy eating or activity and is taking a terrible toll on our nation's health. Long commute distances and busy thoroughfares discourage walking and biking. Parents no longer feel it is safe to let their children walk to school or play outside after school. Parks departments do not have adequate budgets to keep parks open and well-maintained. The food environment is characterized by a proliferation of heavily marketed snacks and sodas, donut shops and fast food chains, and an ever larger proportion of processed foods and

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STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS: The California Adolescent Nutrition and Fitness Program (CANFit) ■ California Center for Public Health Advocacy ■ California Food Policy Advocates ■ California Pan Ethnic Health Network ■ California Park & Recreation Society ■ California Project LEAN ■ California WIC Association Child Care Food Program Roundtable ■ Latino Health Access ■ Prevention Institute ■ Samuels & Associates, Inc ■ YMCA of the East Bay

super sized servings. Healthy options at affordable prices can be difficult to find especially in neighborhoods where residents have limited incomes.

Poor nutrition and physical inactivity are estimated to have cost California \$28 billion during 2005 for medical care, worker's compensation, and lost productivity. In California, the total direct and indirect costs of diabetes have been estimated to be more than \$17.9 billion per year. (California DHS, Fast Facts on Diabetes, August 2003) Additionally, the public pays about \$39 billion a year -- or about \$175 per person -- for obesity through Medicare and Medicaid programs, which cover sicknesses caused by obesity including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, several types of cancer and gallbladder disease. California spends the most on health care for the obese, \$7.7 billion. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2003)

Policymakers must address poor nutrition and physical inactivity, or the state and local governments face a future marred by increased healthcare costs and a growing burden on government finances. Education on nutrition and fitness is not enough; policies that change the environment are necessary to increase access to healthy food and physical activity. Many Californians have been working to implement strategies to improve school, workplace, and neighborhood environments. For California to enjoy a healthy future, leaders are needed who will continue this trend and enact policies that promote healthy food and physical activity in schools, worksites, and communities.

CANDIDATES QUESTIONS

What will you do to ensure implementation of SB12 (School Nutrition Standards) and 965 (Healthy Beverage Bill) and continued improvement of the nutritional quality of school meals?

What steps will you take to support community design and local transportation planning that meaningfully takes into account the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transit users?

What actions will your office initiate to support improving access to produce and other healthy foods in underserved neighborhoods?

What steps will your office take to address inequities in access to parks and open space?

What are your strategies for limiting children's exposure to advertising promoting consumption of unhealthy food and beverages?