
The Obesity Prevention Policy Agenda: What Do Policymakers Think?

Presented by

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Methods

Methods

- Mail- and web-based survey
- Data collected during March-April 2010
- Study focused on policymakers from Healthy Eating, Active Communities (HEAC) and Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Project (CCROPP) sites

Sample

- A special list of 880 policymakers from CCROPP and HEAC counties was developed:
 - ❑ U.S. congressional representatives from the counties
 - ❑ State senators and assembly members
 - ❑ Supervisors, health officers and other county officials
 - ❑ Mayors, city council members and other municipal officials
 - ❑ School board members, superintendents and other school officials
 - ❑ Members of regional governing bodies

Sample

- 24% response rate, about equal across CCROPP and HEAC counties
- HEAC counties:
Alameda, Los Angeles, Orange, San Diego, Shasta
- CCROPP counties:
Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Tulare

Characteristics of Responders

- Roughly equal representation across the county, municipal and school sectors; in CCROPP, the municipal representatives were somewhat over-represented (44%)
- No congressional, and only a handful of state legislators (4), responded
- 2/3 were the officials themselves; the rest were staff members

Characteristics of Responders

- Party Affiliation:
 - HEAC sample was 47% Democratic, 28% Republican, balance other
 - CCROPP sample was 46 % Republican, 26% Democratic, balance other
- Ideology:
 - Liberals were the largest group in HEAC (42%), while conservatives were the largest group in CCROPP (43%)
- About one-third of HEAC sample were very focused on health issues; in CCROPP, it was about one-quarter; the largest groups in both said they were somewhat focused on health (45%)

Overview of Findings

Primary Cause of Obesity: Individual or Environmental Level?

- Majority pointed to individual, but it is bigger in CCROPP: 76% vs. 54% in HEAC
- How much of a cause is the environment?
- 41% in CCROPP see it as consequential, but only 20% give it weight equal to/greater than the individual
- In HEAC, 59% see a consequential environmental influence with 43% giving it equal or greater weight

Support for Government Action

- Despite these differences, there was overwhelming support for government action: 88% in HEAC and 73% in CCROPP
- Intensity of support is greater in HEAC; 57% strongly favor government action, as opposed to only 39% in CCROPP

Doing Enough?

- The majority (58%) of HEAC policymakers believed that their policy body was doing the right amount on the obesity issue; 38% believe they are doing too little
- The reverse is true in the CCROPP area: 50% of CCROPP policymakers believe they are doing too little; only 38% say they are doing enough

Act Now or Wait for Economic Recovery?

- Half (50%) in CCROPP believed that government spending on the issue should await economic recovery; the other half disagreed or were not sure
- Only 35% of HEAC policymakers want to wait; 56% took the opposing view

Moving the Agenda Forward: What's Possible in the Short Run?

- Some items on agenda draw broader support than others
- Some viewed as more likely or possible within the next few years given fiscal and political realities

School Food and Beverage Policies: Free and Safe Drinking Water in Schools

- Extremely broad support among both HEAC and CCROPP policymakers:
 - 94% in CCROPP
 - 97% in HEAC
- Some reported already taking action:
 - 21% in HEAC, and
 - 20% in CCROPP
- Of the rest, a majority think progress is either likely or possible in the next few years:
 - 62% in CCROPP
 - 63% in HEAC

School Food and Beverage Policies: Banning Sale of Unhealthy Foods in CA Schools

- Majorities somewhat smaller, but still big:
 - 76% in CCROPP
 - 82% in HEAC.
- Some report that steps have already been taken:
 - 40% in HEAC
 - 19% in CCROPP.
- Opinions of the rest are divided, however, on how possible this is: 53% in CCROPP; significantly fewer in HEAC – 44% – believe action is at least possible

School Food and Beverage Policies: Federal Ban on Unhealthy Foods in Schools

- Broad support in both:
 - 66% in CCROPP
 - 70% in HEAC
- Far fewer see it as possible:
 - 48% in CCROPP
 - 46% in HEAC

School Food and Beverage Policies: Federal Funding for Improvements in School Meals

- Broad support:
 - 79% in CCROPP
 - 91% in HEAC
- Sizeable majorities think this is possible:
 - 69% in CCROPP
 - 62% in HEAC

Healthy Food Access: Setting Nutrition Standards for Government Run Programs

- Very broad support:
 - 79% in CCROPP
 - 88% in HEAC
- Big majorities also see this as possible:
 - 70 % in CCROPP
 - 71% in HEAC

Healthy Food Access: Zoning Changes to Encourage Gardens and Farmer's Markets

- Broad support:
 - 69% in CCROPP
 - 82% in HEAC
- Some report already taking steps:
 - 16% in HEAC
 - 7% in CCROPP
- Of the rest, a majority thinks it is possible in the next few years:
 - 62% in CCROPP
 - 60% in HEAC

Healthy Food Access: Federal Requirements for Calorie Labeling

- Broad support:
 - 66% in CCROPP
 - 84% in HEAC
- Many also thought this was possible:
 - 59% in CCROPP
 - 67% in HEAC, significantly more (was included in health care reform legislation)

Healthy Food Access: Grocery Store Incentive Programs

- More problematic, at least in more conservative areas.
- Support seems to be broad:
 - 68% in CCROPP
 - 85% in HEAC
- Fewer see it as possible:
 - 49% in CCROPP
 - 62% in HEAC, significantly more

Fast Food Limits: Limiting Density of Establishments

- Opinions are divided:
 - 36% support in CCROPP
 - 57% in HEAC
- Not viewed as possible: only 34% in CCROPP and 37% in HEAC responded affirmatively on feasibility question.

Fast Food Access: Restricting Access near Schools

- Divided opinions:
 - 32% support in CCROPP
 - 49% in HEAC
- Only 28% in CCROPP and 29% in HEAC believe possible.

Fast Food Access: Sweetened Beverage Tax/Fee

- Opinions are divided:
 - 41% support in CCROPP
 - 58% in HEAC
- Only a minority see it as possible in next few years:
 - 43% in CCROPP
 - 47% in HEAC

Fast Food Access: Restrictions on Marketing of Unhealthy Foods to Youth

- Broad support in HEAC (63%); far less in CCROPP (37%)
- Relatively few see it as possible:
 - 33% in CCROPP
 - 41% in HEAC, significantly more

School PE: Enforcing PE Laws and Fully Funding Programs

- Very broad support:
 - 88% in CCROPP
 - 95% in HEAC
- Big majorities see this as possible:
 - 68% in CCROPP
 - 64% in HEAC

Establishment of Joint Use Policies

- Very broad support: 98% in both
- Some have already taken steps:
 - 38% in HEAC
 - 38% in CCROPP
- Barely half of the rest see progress as possible in the next few years: 51% in both

Limiting Screen Time in Pre-School and Other Youth Service Settings

- Reasonably broad support:
 - 56% in CCROPP
 - 67% in HEAC
- Fewer see it as possible:
 - 44% in CCROPP
 - 53% in HEAC

Activity-Related Infrastructure Enhancements: Building Sidewalks and Street Crossings

- Very broad support:
 - 94% in CCROPP
 - 99% in HEAC
- Many have taken steps:
 - 31% in HEAC, and
 - 22% in CCROPP
- Majority of the rest think building sidewalks and street crossings is possible:
 - 58%, CCROPP
 - 56%, HEAC

Activity-Related Infrastructure Enhancements: Retrofitting Streets

- Very broad support:
 - 82% CCROPP
 - 94% in HEAC
- Some have taken steps:
 - 24% in HEAC
 - 16% in CCROPP
- Among rest, there is division on feasibility: 49% in CCROPP and 44% in HEAC view it as possible

Activity-Related Infrastructure Enhancements: Developing Off-Street Trails

- Very broad support:
 - 93% in CCROPP
 - 96% in HEAC
- Some have taken steps:
 - 23% in HEAC, and
 - 27% in CCROPP
- Majority of rest think this is possible: 51% in both

Activity-Related Infrastructure Enhancements: Building Parks and Playgrounds in Neighborhoods

- Very broad support:
 - 96% in CCROPP
 - 97% in HEAC
- Some have already taken these steps:
 - 39% in HEAC, and
 - 39% in CCROPP
- Of the rest, action in short-term seen as problematic:
47% in CCROPP and 44% in HEAC think it is feasible

Transportation: Increased Federal Funding for Alternative Transportation

- Very broad support:
 - 79% in CCROPP, and
 - 92% in HEAC
- Big majorities view this as possible:
 - 67%, CCROPP
 - 64%, HEAC

Transportation: Promoting Increased Transit Use at State and Local Level in CA

- Very broad support:
 - 80% in CCROPP
 - 94% in HEAC
- Opinions are divided on its feasibility: 51% in CCROPP think the California effort is possible, compared to only 38% in HEAC, significantly fewer

Safety/Violence Prevention: Improvement of Safety in Open Spaces

- Overwhelmingly broad support:
 - 94% in CCROPP
 - 95% in HEAC
- Some have already taken steps:
 - 25% in HEAC
 - 21% in CCROPP
- Majority saw this as possible in the next few years:
 - 64% in CCROPP
 - 55% in HEAC, significantly fewer

Increased Funding for Community Wellness Programs

- Broad support:
 - 73% in CCROPP
 - 88% in HEAC
- Sizeable majorities see it as possible to accomplish:
 - 63% in CCROPP
 - 65% in HEAC

Partisan and Ideological Differences

- There are clear partisan and ideological differences on the issue.
- Democrats, liberals and middle-of-the-roaders are most likely to take the public health position while Republicans and conservatives are significantly less likely.

Perceptions about Voter Attitudes

- The majority of CCROPP policymakers (51%) said that the majority of voters support *some* of the policies; only 30% say *all or most*
- In the HEAC areas, majority (54%) said that the majority of voters support *all or most* of the policies; 35% say voters support only *some*
- The majority in both areas detect little voter interest in the issue: 58% in HEAC and 76% in CCROPP said voters never or only rarely raise it or do so less than other issues

Conclusions

Policymaker Attitudinal Data: Conclusions

- Conservative areas: more likely to view problem as individual, less likely to highly value environmental causes, more likely to want to wait for improved economy, and less enthusiastic about taking action
- Despite this, there is still support for the public health agenda
- Very broad support for majority of proposals
- Here are the exceptions:
 - Fast food restrictions (even near schools)
 - Sweetened beverage tax
 - Food marketing restrictions
 - Limits on screen time in government run youth programs

Policymaker Attitudinal Data: Conclusions

- Increasing taxes and restrictions on personal freedom are main concerns; only one of the restricting measures commanded broad support – the ban on unhealthy foods in schools
- Spending does not seem to be as big a concern
- Strong party and ideological differences on the issues
- Little perceived voter interest
- Many of the agenda items are viewed as feasible in the short run

Policymaker Attitudinal Data: Conclusions

- Here are the ones that were not viewed as feasible or where there was division:
 - ❑ CA ban on unhealthy foods and beverages in schools
 - ❑ Federal ban on unhealthy foods and beverages in schools
 - ❑ Grocery store incentives
 - ❑ Sweetened beverage tax
 - ❑ Fast food restrictions
 - ❑ Joint use (but 4 in 10 have already taken action)

Policymaker Attitudinal Data: Conclusions

- Here are the ones that were not viewed as feasible or where there was division (*continued*):
 - ❑ Screen time limits
 - ❑ Street retrofitting (some have already taken action)
 - ❑ Off street trails (some have already taken action)
 - ❑ Building parks and playgrounds (some have already taken action)
 - ❑ Increased CA efforts to promote transit

What Do CA Voters Think?

Is Issue a Personal or Community One?

- Only 38% think it's personal in late 2010 survey
- Like policymakers, voters are divided by party:
 - Democrats say community 59 to 27%
 - Republicans say personal 58 to 29%
 - Others/None say community by 52 to 33%, resembling Democrats

Is Issue a Personal or Community One?

- Voters are also divided by ideology, although a surprising number of moderate conservatives view the problem as a community one.
 - % Saying personal
 - Strong conservatives: 68%
 - Moderate conservatives: 46 (39% disagree)
 - Middle of road: 33
 - Moderate liberals: 25
 - Strong liberals: 16
 - Tea Party enthusiast
 - A lot: 76%
 - Some: 48
 - All other: 28

How Important Is Business and Government Action?

- Importance:
 - ❑ Very important: 44%
 - ❑ Somewhat: 33
 - ❑ Combined: 77
 - ❑ Not important: 10
 - ❑ No opinion: 3

- Majorities of all partisans support action:
 - ❑ 87% of Democrats say important (55% very)
 - ❑ 59% of GOP (only 24% say very)
 - ❑ 78% of Independents (48% strongly)

How Important Is Business and Government Action?

- Even a majority of strong conservatives support action, as do many strong Tea Party enthusiasts
 - % Saying important
 - Strong conservatives: 52%
 - Moderate conservatives: 78
 - Middle of road: 81
 - Moderate liberals: 86
 - Strong liberals: 93
 - Tea Party enthusiast
 - A lot: 47
 - Some: 64
 - All other: 85

Specific Policy Measures Examined

- Require PE for all 4 years of high school
- Require school facilities be open when school is not in session
- Require cities to make street improvements so it's easier to walk and bike
- Enforce laws banning sale of unhealthy foods and drinks in schools

Specific Policy Measures Examined

- Ban all forms of advertising of unhealthy products in schools
- Provide government help to supermarkets located in low-income neighborhoods
- Ban sale of all sugar-sweetened beverages in schools and use money to fight childhood obesity

Stance on Policy Measures

- Results:
 - Large majorities support all
 - Closest margins are for ban on sugar-sweetened beverages (61%) and tax on them (56%)
- Concern about beverage tax is similar to policymakers'

Stance on Policy Measures

- CA voters may be less concerned than policymakers with the idea of restricting personal freedoms; they support bans on unhealthy foods and beverages and their marketing in schools
- There is surprising support from moderate conservatives on some of the measures, suggesting an opportunity to span red vs. blue divide