

THE FUTURE IS NOW

Improving Health in Urban Areas

Working together, the Medical College of Wisconsin and partners in the community are addressing leading health risks and creating a healthier future for children, adults and the elderly. More than 150 Medical College faculty and staff are engaging with more than 200 diverse community groups to strengthen the capacity of the community and individuals to improve health.





Curbing obesity in city children

A partnership between the Medical College of Wisconsin and the United Neighborhood Centers of Milwaukee is working to increase healthy eating and physical activity for the city's children. Their efforts aim to prevent obesity and create the foundation of good health for the future.

The Milwaukee Childhood Obesity Prevention Project began with funding from the Medical College's Healthier Wisconsin Partnership Program. The project is now being expanded through funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Recent surveys report up to 44% of Milwaukee children as overweight or obese. Of concern is that obesity predisposes children to a number of chronic diseases, including high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease and stroke.

The United Neighborhood Centers of Milwaukee (UNCOM) is a collaborative group of eight agencies serving Milwaukee's most economically distressed areas. "Families in low-income neighborhoods have less access to healthy foods and safe places to play. Many schools have reduced physical education and recess time, fewer children are walking or riding bikes to school, and screen time consumes more hours than in past generations," said Sarah O'Connor, the project's manager from UNCOM.

Working collaboratively with these community centers, this project is shaping policy and programming

aimed at healthy eating, weight and activity. "These are not one-size-fits-all programs. Each neighborhood center finds what works for the individual needs of their

community," said David Nelson, PhD. Dr. Nelson and John Meurer, MD, MBA, are the project's key partners from the Medical College. Dr. Meurer established the Medical College's childhood obesity prevention partnership with UNCOM. Dr. Nelson now directs the project for UNCOM.

At the Agape Community Center, which offers a dinner program that serves more than 14,500 adults and children annually, project members engaged Agape's staff and volunteers in changing the menus to healthier food. Meals now emphasize fresh vegetables and fruit, salads, lean proteins, and whole grains. Vending machines with unhealthy snacks and beverages were removed.

Local colleges and universities have been key collaborators. Marquette University exercise students, Mount Mary College dietetic students, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee nursing students, and Medical College pediatric residents and medical students conduct wellness, exercise and nutrition programs.

Now through the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funding, the partnerships and programs have expanded to involve the resources and expertise of many other organizations, including: Milwaukee Public Schools, Children's Health Education Center, Milwaukee Area Technical College, Badgerland Striders, City of Milwaukee Health Department, Boys and Girls Clubs, Milwaukee Bicycle Works, Milwaukee County Parks, Walnut Way, UW School of Medicine and Public Health, Sixteenth Street Community Health Center, YMCA of Greater Milwaukee, Planning Council, Playworks Milwaukee, Zilber Initiative, Y-Eat Right, Active Across America, and the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board.

Sarah O'Connor is Project Manager of the Milwaukee Childhood Obesity Prevention Project with the United Neighborhood Centers of Milwaukee. Dr. Meurer is Professor of Pediatrics and Director of the Medical College's Institute for Health and Society. Dr. Nelson is Assistant Professor of Family and Community Medicine.

At the Agape Community Center's dinner program, Kitchen Manager Katina Davis-Allen (standing left) serves a healthy meal of chicken tetrazzini, spinach salad and yogurt with fruit, to Dora Thomas (seated to right of Katina) and her children.