



TOOLKIT

Message Guide

MISSOURI FOUNDATION FOR HEALTH

Healthy Schools Healthy Communities

LET'S BUILD A HEALTHIER FUTURE

*In 2013, Missouri Foundation for Health established the **Healthy Schools Healthy Communities (HSHC)** initiative to address childhood obesity in select areas. HSHC brought together schools, community organizations, businesses, parents, and other residents to identify and advocate for changes that increase access to healthy food and physical activity where our kids live, learn, and play. This toolkit was originally developed as part of the initiative and has been adapted for statewide use.*

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The conversation surrounding obesity often focuses on personal responsibility. But we know the importance of—if not the inseparable need for—spaces and policies that make it possible for families to eat healthy and get active. The messages in this guide work to make that connection clear to decision makers so they can better understand the role communities can play in making healthy eating and active living more accessible.

Across Missouri, individuals and organizations are working to build a healthier future for our children and families. This guide was developed to support those efforts by increasing consistency and volume of key messages—further reinforcing efforts across the state.

The messages outlined in this guide are rooted in research and experience with initiatives across the state. They are designed to be used when engaging with decision makers, such as community and business leaders, policy makers, educators, health care providers, and others. These messages can be used in informal conversations, at meetings, or in presentations and materials.

We encourage you to share this guide with individuals and organizations working to build a healthier future in Missouri.

Questions? Contact info@mffh.org

Framing Your Message

This message guide includes a series of messages that can be used in different situations and with different audiences. To ensure your message hits home with your audiences, be sure to work in these four elements:

1. Underscore the Importance of Community-Driven Change

A healthier future for Missouri families starts in our communities. By making it easier to eat healthy and get active, we can help our friends, family, and neighbors live their best life.

2. Share Facts that Bring the Issue to Life

Today in Missouri, almost two out of every three adults are overweight or obese.

Check out www.exploreMOhealth.org for county and ZIP code health data.

3. Inspire with a Strong Call to Action

For lasting change to take hold, it must be created and driven at the local level—by our community, for our community.

4. Invite Them to Help Lead the Way

The children and families in our community are counting on us to build a healthier future. As a local leader, your support and engagement can kickstart positive and lasting change.

And don't forget to add your personal touch! Whether it's your own experience or the story of someone from your community, stories go a long way to help people connect with the issue.

A Quick Note About the Word “Obesity”

In 2015, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation released message guidance for *Inspiring Parents to Demand Communities Where All Children Can Grow Up at a Healthy Weight*. Through research, they uncovered that “starting a conversation with ‘childhood obesity’ triggers fatigue, defensiveness, and individual responsibility/blame.” Instead, talking about “helping children grow up at a healthy weight” is more likely to keep your audience engaged.



Core Messages

Use these messages to set the stage for why addressing the health of Missourians starts with healthy communities.

- We can and must work together to build a healthier future for Missouri children and families. It starts in our counties, cities, and towns.
- By building healthier communities, we can help Missourians lead healthy lives.
- Today in Missouri, almost two out of every three adults are overweight or obese.ⁱ And almost 30% of our children ages 10-17 are on track to follow in those footsteps.ⁱⁱ We must work together to create ways for our friends, family, and neighbors to reach and maintain a healthy weight.
- It will take all of us working together to make it easier for people to eat healthy and get active. This includes schools, community groups, businesses, and residents.
- We want to energize communities across Missouri to help children and adults maintain a healthy weight. We do this by making it easier for all Missourians—no matter who they are or where they live—to eat healthy and get active.
- For people to eat well, they need access to fresh fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods. To get active, they need to have safe spaces where they can walk, run, and play. It's on us, as a community, to make sure that our families, friends, and neighbors have the tools they need to live a healthy life.

Calls to Action

Use these messages to build excitement and encourage participation in your efforts.

- We all have a role to play in creating healthy opportunities for families and children. As a leader in our community, we hope you join us and lead the way toward a healthier future.
- Be a part of the movement in our community. Whether you make changes at home or support healthy changes in town, every little bit counts, and you can make a difference.



Appealing to Decision Makers

Individuals and organizations may be more likely to engage in your efforts if you can connect the dots to their work or motivations. These messages appeal to their role in the community or highlight the issues they're focused on.



Business Leaders

- A healthy community is good for business. Studies show that when people are healthy, they are more likely to graduate high school and go on to get a higher level of education, like technical or bachelor's degrees. They can be more productive in their jobs. And they can invest more dollars back into the community instead of paying for medical expenses. That helps local businesses and our economies flourish.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Businesses are the heart of our communities. They help our towns thrive. They employ friends, family, and neighbors, and provide spaces for residents to connect with one another. By supporting efforts to build a healthier future, those closest to you stand to benefit—and so does your bottom line.
- Healthy employees are less likely to miss work and more likely to be productive and happy in their job.^{iv} That's good for your employees and good for business.
- Healthy communities can attract new businesses. Many businesses see access to physical activity and healthy food as an asset. They are also looking for places to operate where there is a healthy workforce.



Health Care Professionals

- You know firsthand the importance of eating healthy and getting active. Share your voice. Call on our community to come together to increase access to healthy food and physical activity.

- Obesity is a problem we can't ignore. More than half of today's children will be obese by the time they are 35 years old.^v We need your expertise, and your trusted voice, to help others understand the importance of building a healthy community. A community where everyone has a chance to eat well and get active to maintain a healthy weight.



Educators

- Research shows that children who are at a healthy weight perform better at school than overweight or obese children.^{vi}
- Students who are active are more likely to have better grades and school attendance. They also have an easier time focusing and staying on task.^{vii}
- Healthy students are better learners. Kids who don't eat enough healthy foods like fruits, vegetables, and dairy products, tend to have lower grades than their peers.^{viii}
- Children spend up to half of their waking hours and consume up to 50% of their total calories at school. We must focus on providing healthy foods during the school day to give kids the best chance to live healthy.^{ix}



Other Community Leaders

- You have the chance to leave a lasting, positive mark on our community. Whether it's increasing access to healthy food or creating more spaces to get active, you can make a difference for our children and families.



Messages to Promote Specific Activities

These messages are designed to help you connect the dots between the importance of community-driven change and programs and activities that support healthy eating and active living. We have included links to toolkits developed by organizations across the state and country to help you dive into specific activities.



Nutrition

- Many of us rely on eating out for quick and easy dining. And research shows consumers prefer restaurants that offer healthy meals.^x Restaurants can attract customers while helping people make healthy choices.
- Local food retailers play an important role across Missouri towns and cities. They are gathering places and important members of the community. They are also employers and economic forces in the state. By offering more healthy options, stores of all sizes can play a role in making sure Missourians have access to nutritious food.
- Forming healthy habits early helps our kids grow up at a healthy weight. When they eat up to 50% of their calories in school, we have the responsibility to provide them with healthy, nutritious foods.^{xi}

Additional Resources

[Win with Water](#)

Missouri Foundation for Health

[Stock Healthy Shop Healthy](#)

University of Missouri Extension

[Adult Tool Kit for Health Care Providers](#)

Missouri DHSS

[Missouri Team Nutrition Resources](#)

Missouri DHSS



Childhood Obesity

- Our kids deserve a healthy start in life. That’s why we must work together to increase access to healthy food and physical activity where our kids live, learn, and play. Because when our kids are healthy, our community is healthy.
- Children spend up to half their waking hours at school. Helping kids understand what it means to eat healthy starts with what they eat at school. And our school district has an important role in making sure children get active daily. Programs supporting safe walking and biking routes to school, sports, recess, and physical education, help students develop lifelong healthy habits and stay focused during the school day.

Additional Resources

[Back to School Toolkit](#)

Missouri Foundation for Health

[Healthy Lifestyles Initiative in Early Childhood](#)

12345 Fit-Tastic!

[Childhood Obesity Prevention Strategies for Rural Communities](#)

Nemours

[Child & Adolescent Tool Kit for Healthcare Providers](#)

Missouri DHSS

[Messaging Toolkit to Promote the Prevention and Treatment of Childhood Obesity in Missouri](#)

Missouri Council for Activity and Nutrition



Staff Wellness

- Investing in workplace wellness pays off. Healthy employees help reduce costs associated with health care and absenteeism. And when workers are more satisfied and productive, they help build a better business.
- Improving staff wellness in schools helps teachers perform at their best. It also helps them model healthy behaviors for students.

Additional Resources

[WorkWell Missouri](#)

University of Missouri Extension

[Health Promotion for Staff](#)

Alliance for a Healthier Generation

[School Wellness Committee Toolkit](#)
Alliance for a Healthier Generation

[Worksite Wellness Tools](#)
Missouri DHSS



Healthy Concessions

- Healthy options at concession stands helps people eat healthy while they get active and cheer on our kids. It's good for our health and can provide funds for student and community activities.

Additional Resources

[Eat Smart in the Parks Toolkit](#)
University of Missouri Extension

[Improving the Nutrition Environment Through Changing Concession Stand Options](#)
University of Iowa Prevention Research Center



Livable Streets

- Missouri's communities have the power to create a healthier and more vibrant future for our state. By adopting livable streets policies, our counties, cities, and towns are better connected. Businesses are more likely to invest. And we all have more ways to get active.

Additional Resources

[Missouri Livable Streets Tools](#)
Missouri Livable Streets

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