

## **FRONTIER TOWN FIGHTS OBESITY**

*Montana mayor helps his town get healthier food choices in stores and restaurants*

### **Public Health Problem**

- Combating the growing problem of obesity in Montana means implementing strategies to improve the food, nutrition and physical activity habits of residents.
- Shelby, Montana, like many frontier towns, doesn't have an extensive public health system or a large budget for health projects.
- Residents also depend on food available locally since the next-nearest stores and restaurants are eighty miles away.

### **Program**

- The City of Shelby used a small grant to conduct focus groups on nutrition and physical activity topics. This grant came from the Montana Nutrition and Physical Activity Program under a contract from the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services to Montana State University. Funds for the Program are supplied by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity.
- A Columbia University graduate student did formative research on local food choices, a walking trail, and support for breastfeeding, key elements of obesity prevention efforts.
- Results of a Nutrition Environment Measurements Survey in Shelby showed that healthful foods were seldom available at restaurants and convenience stores.
- Responses to a survey of residents initiated by the town's mayor showed that residents wanted more healthy options in restaurants, particularly on children's menus.

### **Impact**

- The engagement of Shelby's mayor is driving the development of strategies to work with restaurant managers and food distributors serving the Shelby area on incentives for increasing availability of competitively priced, healthy food in this community.
- A baseline town assessment is providing comprehensive information on the eating and physical activity habits and physical measurements of a large percentage of the town's children and adults.
- A repeat assessment will give local officials valuable feedback on the steps they're taking to make the town environment healthier, including changes in the food system and increasing access to opportunities for physical activity.
- A promotional campaign using bartered radio time and newspaper space, if necessary, will encourage residents to patronize restaurants and stores offering healthy foods and to use the local trail.

### **Contact**

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