

# Building and sustaining healthy policies:

## Statewide impact of the PA NAPSACC program through the SPAN grant May 2023

**Overview:** The Pennsylvania Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care (PA NAPSACC) is a continuous quality improvement (CQI) strategy focused on improving nutrition and physical activity practices and policies within early childhood education (ECE) settings. Participation empowers program leadership and includes individualized technical assistance to increase staff knowledge, improve the quality of ECE environments and establish sustainable practices and policies. In SPAN Years 1-4, the PA Department of Health (the Department) and the Tuscarora Intermediate Unit (TIU) utilized SPAN funding and leveraged Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant funds to enroll 100 ECE programs into the PA NAPSACC program per year. A combined total of 285 ECE programs from 52 counties in PA have completed the program so far. Over 200 of these ECE programs have either established or enhanced physical activity and nutrition policies, impacting more than 20,000 children.

**Public Health Challenge:** Obesity is a complex disease that affects millions of American adults and children. In PA in 2020, 13.1% of children age 2-4 who receive WIC benefits have obesity.<sup>1</sup> Many factors contribute to obesity, including eating habits, physical activity, poverty, genetics and environment. In children, obesity can lead to diabetes, low self-esteem, low quality of life, psychological problems, bullying and an increased risk of obesity and chronic illness in adulthood.<sup>2</sup> Hunger and lack of nutrition security can also be harmful children’s social, emotional and physical health. Of the 1,219,130 people facing food insecurity in PA, 325,170 are children.<sup>3</sup> Outside of the home, children spend a lot of time at schools and childcare centers, which can directly impact children’s health. The PA NAPSACC program can help combat obesity and food insecurity by equipping ECE programs with the knowledge and resources to implement policies and practices that increase access to healthy food and eating practices and physical activity opportunities for young children.



**1 in 8 children in PA face hunger**

**13.1% of children aged 2 to 4 on WIC in PA have obesity**

**Approach:** PA NAPSACC is promoted through a wide range of state and local channels to ensure that this opportunity is offered equitably and to increase participation in SPAN priority counties, which have higher rates of childhood obesity and lower rates of nutrition security. These promotion methods include the PA NAPSACC listserv, Keystone Kids Go (KKG) Workgroup members and partner networks, Early Learning Resource Centers (ELRCs), Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) sponsors and the PA Early Ed Newsletter. Once enrolled, the participating ECE programs complete the nationally recognized Go NAPSACC child nutrition and physical activity self-assessment at two time points over the eight months of the program (pre and post assessments). These assessments measure the percentage best practices met in each program at each time point. Best practice topic areas include food and beverages provided, indoor and outdoor play environment, teacher practices, education and professional development and policy. All participating sites receive technical assistance (TA) to develop or enhance nutrition and physical activity policies and sustain the healthy changes made through the PA NAPSACC program. The PA Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics’ (PA AAP) Early Childhood Education Linkage System (ECELS) engages child care health consultants to support nutrition and physical activity policy development and enhancement to ECE programs participating in PA NAPSACC. Developing or enhancing a policy with these consultants can help ECE programs earn a higher designation in Keystone STARS, PA’s quality rating and improvement system (QRIS). Successful completion of the PA NAPSACC program also makes ECE programs eligible for Keystone STARS bonus points. The Go NAPSACC assessment tool is available for free use by any ECE program in the state.

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity. Data, Trend and Maps [online]. <https://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/data-trends-maps/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> Consequences of Obesity. (2022, July 15). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/basics/consequences.html>

<sup>3</sup> Pennsylvania | Feeding America. (2022). <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/pennsylvania>

**Results:** From Years 1-4 of the SPAN grant, the PA NAPSACC program reached:



**285 ECE programs**  
from 52 counties



Over **20,000 children**

The PA NAPSACC CQI process, as well as TA from ECELS and TIU led to policy development and expansion that will impact staff and children at these participating ECE programs for years to come. As of a result of completing the PA NAPSACC program:



**76%** of participating ECE programs (205) either **established** or **enhanced** nutrition policies.



**72%** of participating ECE programs (204) either **established** or **enhanced** physical activity policies.

In SPAN Year 5, an additional 87 ECE programs are expected to complete the PA NAPSACC program. Data that captures final program completion and achievements will not be available until June 2023. However, these programs have the potential to reach a combined total of 897 staff members and 6,116 children.

**Sustaining Success:** The PA NAPSACC program has impacted both children and staff at participating ECEs. The following are quotes from former PA NAPSACC participants, describing the impact and benefits of the program:

“I liked being able to choose improvement areas myself and the great feedback on my newly written policies.”

“This was a wealth of information, resources, and support.”

“The PA NAPSACC experience was very helpful, and our center and programs improved because of it.”

The PA NAPSACC program is ultimately, a CQI strategy aimed at sustaining change through policy development, enhancement and implementation. Participation supports ECE programs to establish and expand policies to codify and standardize nutrition and physical activity best practices. These policies are tangible products that staff can refer to and share with families. Further, PA NAPSACC participants have continued free access to the Go NAPSACC assessment tool and a network of TA providers. These resources can be utilized to sustain changes already made and work towards new goals. In addition, the KKG website, included below, offers supportive resources and trainings and lists agencies across the state that are dedicated to helping programs sustain and reach new goals. Finally, the national Go NAPSACC program at University of North Carolina has a variety of resources available to PA ECE programs to sustain and build upon the achievements made during SPAN.

**For more information:**

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**Visit:** <https://www.keystonekidsgo.org/napsacc.html>

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