

REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND FITNESS AND THE 2015 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Progress expanding access to healthy food, but little action on other policies to reduce childhood obesity or expand health coverage

This session the Legislature showed additional interest in expanding **access to healthy food** as a strategy for tackling food insecurity. As a leader in the Partnership for a Healthy Texas coalition, Texans Care for Children helped secure more funding for the Surplus Agriculture Grant, which enables food banks to purchase excess produce from Texas farmers and deliver it to the families who need it the most. The Surplus Agriculture Grant also helps to support Brighter Bites, a program to provide healthier food in public schools. Brighter Bites similarly received an increase in funding this session and will be expanding to more school districts across the state.



The Legislature also passed a proposal establishing limited immunity from liability for landowners offering space on their land for community gardens. The proposal aims to encourage development of community gardens by easing the liability concerns of landowners who wish to loan tracts of their land for local gardening efforts. Legislation to incentivize grocery stores to open in underserved neighborhoods fell short but made it further in the process than ever before.

Yet the Legislature paid little attention to traditional **anti-childhood obesity** proposals such as expanding PE in schools; improving nutrition guidelines in child care or elsewhere; facilitating biking and other healthy modes of transportation; and directing state agencies to work on the issue. Despite research that Texas kids consume far too many sugary drinks for a healthy diet, lawmakers failed to consider proposals reviewing junk food and beverage marketing in schools or discouraging sugary drink consumption through public education and a sugary drink tax. Just as in previous legislative sessions, we had to work hard to stop efforts to eliminate fitness evaluations in schools.

The Legislature also demonstrated little interest in working on **access to health care** for low-income children and families. After the newly elected Governor and Lieutenant Governor closed the door on the issue, legislative committees did not even schedule hearings on the bills to accept federal Medicaid funding for low-wage workers. With Texas hospitals and families hurting, we are hopeful that state leaders will start studying conservative approaches used in other states to find a model for Texas.



Outcomes of key health and fitness initiatives this session:

BECAME LAW

SUPPORT CHILDREN'S FITNESS AND NUTRITION

HB 262 - Establishing limited immunity from liability for landowners offering space for community gardens

\$1.2 Million for the Brighter Bites school nutrition program, an increase from \$600,000 in the previous biennium

\$5.9 Million for the Feeding with Impact program to steer excess produce to food banks, an increase from \$2.9 million in the previous biennium

\$2 Million for the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to help schools implement FitnessGram, the state-adopted fitness assessment for students

\$20 Million for the Department of State Health Services chronic disease program, slightly exceeding the agency's base request but not including the "exceptional item" request for prevention

DID NOT PASS

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HB 1202 - Establishing a Community Nutrition Program Policy Advisory Council at the Texas Department of Agriculture

- *Passed the House committee but was not voted on by the full House*

HB 1485 - Establishing the Grocery Access Investment Fund for underserved communities

- *Passed the House on second reading but not third reading*

HB 1616 - Establishing a "Double Dollar" pilot program for produce purchased at farmers markets in underserved communities

- *Left pending after a House committee hearing*

HB 2086 - Requiring additional PE in middle school

- *Did not receive a hearing*

HB 3290 - Establishing the Farm to School Community Connections pilot grant program to increase students' access to and awareness of fresh produce

- *Left pending after a House committee hearing*

SB 954 - Directing school districts' School Health Advisory Councils (SHACs) to make recommendations regarding commercial advertising on school property for junk food

- *Did not receive a hearing*

SB 1371 - Establishing a penny per ounce tax on sugary drinks

- *Did not receive a hearing*

Funding for TEA to support implementation of Coordinated School Health

- *Not included in the final state budget*

MAY HARM CHILDREN'S FITNESS AND NUTRITION

HB 1227 - Eliminating the FitnessGram evaluation for students

- *Passed the House committee but was not voted on by the full House; passed the House as an amendment but did not receive Senate committee approval*

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HB 116, HB 1138, HB 3845, HB 4054, SB 89, SB 423 and SB 1039 - Accepting federal Medicaid expansion funds for uninsured low-wage adults

- *Did not receive a hearing*

HB 1339 - Reducing the current 90-day waiting period in the Children's Health Insurance Program

- *Did not receive a hearing*

MAY HARM CHILDREN AND FAMILIES' ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

HB 2385 - Restricting health care for seriously ill undocumented children

- *Passed the full House and the Senate committee but was not voted on by the full Senate*