

Report recommends setting aside money for obesity prevention

By Paige Parker
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It'll take a minimum of \$10 million annually for obesity education and prevention and another \$3.5 million every two years for school physical education to turn around Oregon's obesity rates, a state taskforce concluded in a report released March 31, 2009.

Six of every 10 Oregon adults, and one in five Oregon children, are overweight or obese. Every year, another 43,500 Oregon adults become obese, putting themselves at greater risk of diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and stroke.

The taskforce, a collection of legislators, public health officials, educators and non-profit leaders, met at the direction of the 2007 Legislature.

Barriers embedded in the physical and social environments have caused an obesity epidemic, and it will take widespread environmental changes to end it, according to the report. In general, the task force advises policies that would make healthy lifestyle choices easier — for instance, those that favor walking and biking over driving and those that make fresh fruits and vegetables as cheap and convenient as processed fast food.

Some legislation related to the task force's work, but not born of it, is under consideration by the 2009 Legislature, said Karen Girard, health promotion manager for the Oregon public health division. The governor's budget includes setting aside \$3 million from a proposed increase to the state's tobacco tax for obesity prevention.

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