



BlueCross BlueShield
of North Carolina

Foundation

An independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association



SHAPE NC: Healthy Starts for Young Children

Background:

The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (BCBSNC) Foundation is partnering with The North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc. (NCPC), the organization that oversees Smart Start, to launch a three-year, \$3 million partnership addressing early childhood obesity. With a focus on the child care setting, *Shape NC* will change policies, practices and environments to increase physical activity and healthy eating. Measures of success will likely include, among others, improved nutrition and physical activity practices in child care settings, healthier play environments and a state-level policy blueprint to impact the health of young children.

This new initiative – *Shape NC* – will build upon the success of existing programs by bringing together three proven strategies to reduce childhood obesity:

- 1) Improving nutrition and physical activity policies and practices in child care (NAP-SACC: Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care)
- 2) Increasing active play by creating outdoor learning environments for children attending child care centers (POD: Preventing Obesity by Design)
- 3) Utilizing existing programs to increase healthy movement (Be Active Kids[®])

The Problem:

- North Carolina has the fifth highest rate of childhood obesity in the country.
- More than 31 percent of North Carolina's children ages 2 to 4 are overweight or considered at risk for becoming overweight, and these rates have steadily increased since 1995.
- More than 200,000 children spend part or all of their day in nearly 5,000 licensed child care centers across the state; some research suggests that young children who attend child care centers are at a less healthy weight than those not in formal care settings.

Vision:

Shape NC will change child care communities so that young children's earliest experiences with food and physical activity promote a lifetime of healthy behaviors.

Proposed Approach:

Through the established statewide Smart Start network, this project brings together the policy, practice and nutrition strength of the NAP-SACC initiative, and combines it with the built environment changes from POD, and the programming and training skills of Be Active Kids. This creates a new network of trained local experts to provide ongoing technical assistance for child care centers. Additionally, *Shape NC* will convene a leadership task force to address the broad health issues facing young children and produce a plan of recommended strategies and policy priorities for the state. *Shape NC* is the first statewide initiative to combine multiple successful strategies and implement both a top-down and bottom-up approach to improve the health of children in child care, their families and their communities.

Shape NC Anticipated Results:

- A statewide policy blueprint for improving the health of North Carolina's young children.
- 30 communities will create community partnerships and action plans for obesity prevention in young children.
- 100 early childhood professionals will incorporate *Shape NC* strategies into their work with children, families and teachers, and as many as 60,000 children, 3,000 families and 2,500 child care teachers/directors will be reached.
- 1,500 early childhood and other related professionals will implement new knowledge about outdoor learning environments and physical activities for children in child care.
- 750 children attending model *Shape NC* early learning programs will participate in daily physical activity and consume healthy meals and snacks. 35 early childhood staff in five pilot centers will model healthy behaviors as a result of participating in the health and wellness program focusing on weight management/maintenance, healthy eating, fitness and smoking cessation.

About The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation

The BCBSNC Foundation is a separate, independent nonprofit foundation dedicated to improving the health and well-being of North Carolinians. BCBSNC Foundation focus areas include: Health of Vulnerable Populations — improving health outcomes of populations served by safety-net organizations; Healthy Active Communities — increasing physical activity and encouraging healthy eating habits; and Community Impact through Nonprofit Excellence — increasing the effectiveness of nonprofit organizations. Since its inception in 2000, BCBSNC Foundation has invested more than \$67 million into North Carolina communities. www.bcbsncfoundation.org

About Smart Start and The North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc.

The earliest years of childhood are critical. Experiences during this time literally shape the structure of the brain. Because today's children are tomorrow's leaders, parents and workers, everyone has a stake in making sure all children have the experiences they need to thrive. Smart Start is the system that brings together all the people involved in a young child's life – families, teachers, doctors, caregivers, social workers and many others – to ensure every child has all they need for healthy growth and development. For more information, visit www.smartstart.org.