Why do States Differ in the Level of Childhood Obesity Legislation?

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Objectives – to examine influence of:

- Type of legislature
- Legislator factors
- Political context
- Bill content
- Public support

Montana Capitol Rotunda
Factors in State Obesity Policy

- Legislative Factors
- Public Support
- Political Context
- Bill Content
- Legislator Factors
## 2 x 2 Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low Obesity</th>
<th>High Obesity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SOUTH DAKOTA</td>
<td>ARIZONA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MONTANA</td>
<td>KANSAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WASHINGTON</td>
<td>LOUISIANA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAINE</td>
<td>NEW YORK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Division of Legislation Tertiles:
- Low Legislation=0-3 Adopted Bills—17 states
- Median=4-7—16 states
- High=8-30—17 states

### Division of Childhood Obesity Tertiles:
- Lower Childhood Obesity=lowest (9.6%) to 13.2%—14 states
- Median=13.3% to 16%—21 states
- High=16.1% to highest (21.9%)—15 states
Descriptive Analysis – Legislators

- 15 White, 3 Black, 2 Hispanic
- Children or grandchildren
- 9 Males, 11 Females
- 10 R, 10 D
- Senate Democrats
- 8 Chair, VC; 12 members

Senators Being Led in Physical Exercises by Physultopathy Founder Bernarr Macfadden, 1924: Black and White Photograph from the Library of Congress features American Work Outs throughout history
Descriptive Analysis – Legislative Factors

- 3 R Gov, 5 D Gov
- Party in House 3 D and 3 R
- Party in Senate 4 D and 3 R
- Term limits gov - 5 yes
- Term limits leg – 5 yes
- 1 professional legislatures
- 3 hybrid legislatures
- 4 part time legislatures
Introduction Results

- Legislator role (in and out of session) influences intent
- Impetus for action not articulated
- Discomfort in state policy role
- Discomfort with evidence and results
- Philosophical support vs. policy action
“there’s support for prevention, but not for legislation”

“In 10 yrs debate, several (bills) introduced but none passed…”

“can you legislate obesity?”

“well aware there is a problem; but the question is how to address it”
Bill Content Results

- Unclear cost or new cost is barrier
- Need for immediate results
- No consensus around role of legislature
- Different definitions
- Different expectations of evidence/science
“not a whole lot of it is science….I think a lot of it is anecdotal…”

“the science is hard because policies are so new”

…any proposed policies with start up money will be hard pressed”

“cost is a make or break issue”
Political Context Results

- Legislators expect but don’t act on public health message
- No compelling social movement
- Opposition viewed as well planned
- Loss outweighs gain
- It’s the economy…

Maine's Speaker of the House, Hannah Pingree announcing policies to curb obesity
Political Context Quotes

- “several people introduced bills but no one is consistently pushing and prodding”...
- “no one comes to mind”
- “are you kidding me? Cost is a very critical issue – a deciding factor”
- “overwhelming budget deficit makes funding obesity policy difficult”
## Different Motivators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>End User</th>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>Legislator</th>
<th>Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time in Job</td>
<td>long</td>
<td>shortest</td>
<td>short</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>university</td>
<td>voters</td>
<td>decision makers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constituents</td>
<td>funders, publishers</td>
<td>voters, party, supporters</td>
<td>Chair, VC, Members, party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External factors</td>
<td>funding, teaching, writing</td>
<td>media, money, public support</td>
<td>habit, relationships, culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time on issue</td>
<td>long</td>
<td>shortest</td>
<td>short</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data used</td>
<td>peer reviewed</td>
<td>Stories, real life, testimony, results</td>
<td>internal/ external support, data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Public Support Results

- Lack consensus on state role
- Unclear wishes of constituents
- Uncertain evidence will work
- Not tied to current priorities
- Media messages inconsistent
- No tie to policy actions
- Engagement not seen as a desire of constituents

Nonprofit Day in Montana Capitol Rotunda
Public Support Quotes

- “…interest in home level, NOT the government…”

- “1) economy, 2) jobs, 3) housing market”

- “Messages would be important as long as they are giving me specific ideas what to do”

- “even if it saves money, it wouldn’t be now, we have to balance a budget now…”
So What?

- Importance of non-modifiable factors
- Legislator discomfort with role and science
- Political context inhibits passage
- Philosophical support vs. policy action
Factors in State Obesity Policy

Legislative Factors

Public Support

Political Context

Bill Content

Legislator Factors