

We Can! (Ways to Enhance Children's Activity and Nutrition)

Challenge: The United States is facing a potentially devastating public health crisis of overweight and obesity. Nearly one-third of all adults are now classified as obese, a figure that has more than doubled over the past 30 years. Perhaps even more alarming is the staggering effect the epidemic has had on children. In just 30 years, obesity has more than doubled among children ages 2–5 and adolescents ages 12–19, and more than tripled among youth ages 6–11. To address this public health crisis, NHLBI selected AED to support the planning, implementation, and evaluation for a national public education outreach program to help parents and youth maintain a healthy weight.

Solution: To cut across the clutter of the various and competing weight management messages currently in existence, AED needed to build a unique approach. We conducted an environmental scan of over 100 national programs on obesity to identify an appropriate niche for the new NHLBI initiative; planned and implemented a two-day NHLBI Strategy Development Workshop with over 70 key researchers, public health leaders, and nutritionists to help identify the science base and direction for effort; conducted a thorough review of the science-based literature on obesity prevention; developed a detailed strategic plan to guide the program; and conducted focus groups and in-depth interviews with consumer audiences.

The resulting program, ***We Can! (Ways to Enhance Children's Activity & Nutrition)*** is unique among existing youth obesity-prevention initiatives in its focus on programs and activities for parents and families as a primary group for influencing youth audiences. *We Can!* provides activities and programs that encourage improved nutritional choices, increased physical activity, and reduced screen time in youth ages 8–13. Materials developed by AED include a parent handbook, a community mobilization tool kit, a six-session parent curriculum for use by community agencies, posters, print ads, radio spots, b-roll footage, and a program fact sheet.

AED identified more than 20 national organizations representing the medical community and healthcare providers, nutritionists, the food industry, family advocacy groups, special population advocacy groups, and other Federal agencies working with the obesity issue to support the planning and implementation of *We Can!* These organizations include Action for Healthy Kids, American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), Produce for a Better Health Foundation (PBH), and the International Food Information Council Foundation (IFIC). Media partners include BET, Univision, and *Parenting* magazine.

Results: *We Can!* was launched on June 1, 2005, in Washington, D.C. with U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Mike Leavitt announcing the program and providing comments in a national press release and conference. Over 42 communities across the U.S. have signed on as official *We Can!* sites. The overall media placement from the launch neared 300 stories in broadcast, print and online media outlets, with viewership exceeding 139 million. The consumer Web site was launched on the same day, providing parents, caregivers, and health care providers with user-friendly resources and tips for preventing childhood obesity.



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