



Testimony before the House Health and Human Services Committee
HB 2208 – An act establishing a task force on the prevention and treatment of
obesity
February 15, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My name is Billie Hall. I am President and CEO of the Sunflower Foundation, Healthcare for Kansans. The Sunflower Foundation was established in August of 2000. Since its inception, the foundation has been concerned about issues related to access to health care, building the capacity of the health care safety net and disease prevention/health promotion. With a mission to serve as a catalyst for improving the health of Kansans, the foundation's program is a balance between grantmaking, foundation initiatives and special projects. In FY 2004, our program focused on the following areas:

Improving Access to Health Care – Projects that support a process to look for options to address health care access and the related issues of costs, coverage and quality;

Building Capacity within the Health Care Safety Net – Projects that build the capacity of core safety net providers to serve the health care needs of growing numbers of uninsured and underinsured;

Reducing the Prevalence of Obesity – Projects to increase our understanding of the problem and test solutions, as well as funding to convene public and private stakeholders to develop a plan of action for consideration at the state and community level;

Strengthening Tobacco Use Prevention and Control – Projects that support community-based tobacco use prevention and control efforts; and

Special Projects – Projects that offer unique opportunities for partnerships, collaborations and leveraging.

We appear today to support the intent of HB 2208. At the request of the sponsor of the bill, we are here to provide what we hope are insights and lessons learned from our efforts over this past year with a public/private partnership convened for the purpose of putting together a state plan to address obesity.

We compliment the sponsor and this committee for identifying a role for the legislature in their commitment to address one of the most complex social issues of our time: reducing the prevalence of obesity and overweight among Kansans.

Convening a Statewide Planning Effort: Role of the Sunflower Foundation

As convener of a public/private effort to address this problem, the Sunflower Foundation provided the forum for a diverse group of leaders in this arena to explore what is possible, connect individuals and organizations and facilitate an ongoing dialogue. The foundation believed it was critical to bring together public and private leaders to identify what current activities and initiatives were in place, and to explore if there were results that could guide a statewide planning effort. This provided the chance to plan, look at funding resources and set a direction for a collective effort in this state.

Goals and Expectations

This planning initiative began with the vision of creating a statewide strategic plan. More specifically, the goals and hopes for this project included:

- Producing a statewide plan for reducing the incidence of obesity and overweight;
- Developing and establishing support and buy-in from key leadership in the state about the need to work together and coordinate efforts;
- Increasing communication and exchange of ideas among leaders, stakeholders and key players interested in the growing crisis of obesity;
- Creating a replicable model for future planning initiatives around key state policy;
- and
- Assessing the effectiveness of this planning approach and how it could be replicated.

We are pleased to have the opportunity to share our experience in addressing these goals with this committee today.

Planning Process

This initiative began with the formation of a structure to guide the process. First, a “Leadership Advisory Group” was identified, consisting of representatives from the Department of Education, Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, the State Insurance Commissioner, other foundations, the Governor’s Office, state associations, and healthcare professionals. These Secretaries, Commissioners and other participants endorsed the need for a coordinated state effort on this issue. A “Core Planning Group” was then established, with representatives from each of the areas listed above assigned to participate as experts and guide the development of a coordinated, comprehensive state plan.

Supporting the work of this group was an inventory of current initiatives in the state, a review of other state planning efforts, a survey completed by the Kansas Health Institute relative to public policy initiatives nationwide and the first hand front-line experience of the Core Planning Group members.

Planning Framework

As the process unfolded, the group moved from developing a statewide plan to developing a statewide framework that would provide individuals and organizations an opportunity to engage in the process without sacrificing or comprising current efforts. With families and individuals in the center, key strategic sectors were identified in which opportunities exist to address these issues (see the diagram below). The focus of our work became fostering an environment where we **seek solutions and share information in a way that leads to effective and comprehensive approaches.**

Lessons Learned

HB 2208 frames a similar approach to that undertaken by the Sunflower Foundation in its convener role. As a result-of our work over the last year, we leaned several important lessons which we believe can help guide the discussion as the legislature determines how best to approach or be a part of a coordinated effort to reduce the prevalence of obesity and overweight in Kansas. These lessons include:

- 1. We don't need to reinvent the wheel.** The current activity and expertise in Kansas

provides a wealth of information and a solid foundation for moving forward. Information about current initiatives and about research underway is readily available. Data is also available about the extent and consequences of obesity in Kansas.

2. No single intervention and approach will be successful on its own. A review of planning activities and efforts to develop a statewide plan in other states confirmed that developing a statewide plan was only one approach to a coordinated effort. The complexity of the issue, coupled with significant activities already in place in the state, made it difficult to build consensus around the most appropriate strategy. The planning group working with the Foundation identified and suggested a number of interventions and approaches, many of which are mentioned in HB 2208. According to a survey and report from the Kansas Health Institute, there is consensus around the harm obesity causes, but population interventions have not had time to demonstrate their effectiveness.

3. Long term commitments are critical. This condition took years, even decades, to develop. Efforts to reverse this situation will require long-term commitment, community support and the ability to document results

4. Collaboration is a key component in making progress. This process clearly demonstrated that no intervention or solution would be effective if individuals or groups acted alone. Collaborations and partnerships are essential to advance improvements around this issue.

Sunflower Foundation Commitment

Over the last year, we have achieved many of the goals we outlined, with one modification: rather than developing a statewide plan, we believe our statewide framework provided a more effective way to target intervention, support and investment that move the dialogue and activity forward.

The Sunflower Foundation remains committed to this issue and is prepared to:

- Provide information to support the legislature in their efforts to reduce the prevalence of obesity and overweight in Kansas;
- Continue to facilitate the dialogue among state leaders, community leaders, experts and key stakeholders;
- Provide a resource for exchange of information and solution based efforts; and
- Through our grantmaking activities, support research based, collaborative approaches in the community that tackle this complex issue.

In conclusion, all of our experience can be summarized by reiterating that we have come to recognize that public/private partnerships will be essential to advance solutions to the growing and complex problem of obesity in Kansas. The Sunflower Foundation stands willing to help this body and other essential stakeholders in that process. We thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee today.