

## Healthiest Next Generation Program Tackles Child Health

By Cathy Flanagan

We've all heard the alarming statistics that due to poor health, the current generation of American children may be the first to have shorter lives than their parents. Therefore it's not surprising that Washington state has started a program to improve the health of its children. There is a distinctive aspect, however. Washington has created a "positive" initiative to combat a negative health issue. It is the action-oriented Healthiest Next Generation Initiative, launched by Gov. Jay Inslee to help children maintain a healthy weight, enjoy active lives, and eat well.



*Gov. Inslee visits Yakima YMCA to promote his Healthiest Next Generation initiative.*

Strong community partners and champions of health like Inslee and John Wiesman, Washington's secretary of health, are the reasons for the rapid implementation and success of the program, says Daisey Orr at the Washington State Department of Health. Orr explains that Wiesman saw a stigma attached to the term "obesity" with children, and believed there would be greater support by promoting a healthy weight and physical activity in a positive light.

The Healthiest Next Generation Initiative is a collaborative effort focused on creating healthy early learning settings in schools and communities. One-time funding through a budget proviso from Washington's legislature supported coordinator positions at the departments of Health and Early Learning and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Together, these coordinators comprise a cross-agency team that meets regularly. "They work together and provide essential leadership to ensure system-level changes and provide the infrastructure that can support communities to achieve lasting results," Orr says.

When team members began meeting in July, they didn't spend much time reanalyzing the problem. Instead they sought real-world stories of successful programs from schools and communities across the nation. They received 200 stories, which

Orr calls the "heart of the Healthiest Next Generation."

From these stories, the team developed its recommendations. The stories put a "face" to the recommendations. They showcased the work communities have been doing for years to encourage



*Gov. Inslee walks with students to West Seattle Elementary.*

breastfeeding and help children eat healthy and be more active in their daily lives, says Orr. The team discovered that improvements made for children's health can have other benefits. For example, when some communities made it easier for children to walk and ride their bikes to school, they also improved the built environment. Another benefit was reducing the amount of air pollution with fewer idling school buses and cars.

The team's recommendations were reviewed by an Equity Review Group from the Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities and then refined by a steering committee of community and business leaders, administrators of local health jurisdictions and state agency managers. Final recommendations were then presented to the Governor's Council for the Healthiest Next Generation.

Washington State saw that states making progress in improving children's health had not found one solution; rather it took several efforts, by many people, in the places where children spend their time—in early learning settings, schools, and communities. Therefore, Inslee's Council consists of a broad range of public and private sector groups with an interest in health, and it features high-level-of-influence individuals necessary to move

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## CDC Campaign Promotes Tdap Vaccine During Pregnancy

By Brad Christensen

The CDC and partners are launching a major campaign to increase the number of women who receive Tdap vaccine during their pregnancies. The campaign's materials are free and available for download at [www.cdc.gov/pertussis/pregnant](http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/pregnant).

The "Born with protection against whooping cough" campaign encourages doctors and pregnant patients to talk about whooping cough and Tdap vaccine.

"We want to protect all young infants from this life-threatening disease," says Nancy Messonnier, MD, deputy director of CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases. "We know that the best way to prevent pertussis in a young infant is by vaccinating the mother during pregnancy, and now, we need to make sure that all pregnant women know that Tdap vaccine is safe, effective and very important for them and their babies."

The campaign and its materials were developed after extensive quantitative and qualitative research

with prenatal healthcare providers (ob-gyns, nurses, and midwives) and pregnant women.

The resources for pregnant women focus on the messages that are most important to them – that the vaccine is safe for you and your baby; getting it during pregnancy can help protect your baby from a life-threatening disease, and it is recommended by your ob-gyn or midwife. There is a fact sheet and print ads/posters. Spanish-language resources will be available.

For healthcare providers, there are two fact sheets. One focuses on making a strong recommendation for Tdap during pregnancy as the standard of care for pertussis prevention in newborns. The second is about providing strong vaccine referrals, and it is intended for providers who do not stock Tdap vaccine in their office.



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the initiative forward. It includes legislators, school officials, businesses such as REI and the Seattle Seahawks, healthcare plans, and community groups like the Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition, the Washington Alliance of YMCAs, and the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), among others. First Lady Trudi Inslee, a child nutrition proponent, also has been an active participant. The Council discussed their priorities and submitted short- and long-term recommendations to Gov. Inslee.

Inslee recently demonstrated his support by calling for a significant investment in the recommendations through his proposed 2015-17 budget. Also included was funding linked to recommendations from the Governor's Blue Ribbon Parks and Outdoor Recreation Task Force, showing the importance of healthy natural environments as places for children and families to be

active. The budget is dependent on legislative passage.

A strong communication plan has been important to the success of the program. All of the agencies and many partners work to keep the Twitter feed with the #HealthiestNextGen hashtag circulating with updated posts including ones from Inslee. They also increase their visibility by partnering with or capitalizing on national and state events such as "walk to school day."

The initiative has been well received. Not so much because it was a new idea, but rather a platform to align partners invested in children's health under the umbrella of the Healthiest Next Generation. Orr emphasizes that from the beginning, Inslee stressed that the initiative is about children and families and should be something we enjoy, something that is fun.