A Statewide Assessment of Obesity Prevention Needs and Readiness among Early Childhood Education Sites

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Background
The USDA’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed) promotes obesity prevention programming in Early Childhood Education centers (ECEs). In Arizona, SNAP-Ed local implementing agencies (“agencies”) support nutrition and physical activity in ECEs with a combination of policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) improvements and direct education. These efforts align with the state’s Empower program, which offers discounted licensing fees for ECEs that agree to implement wellness standards.

Objective
This statewide assessment describes needs, barriers, and opportunities related to the nutrition and physical activity policies and procedures of Arizona’s SNAP-Ed qualifying ECEs.

Methods
We assessed needs and readiness among Arizona’s SNAP-Ed qualifying ECEs using mixed methods:

**Quantitative Data**
We trained SNAP-Ed agencies in 10 Arizona counties to use the Go NAP SACC Child Nutrition and Infant & Child Physical Activity (SNAP-Ed) instruments to collect information related to ECEs’ current practices and policies. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize data.

**Qualitative Data**
At the project close, we collected written narrative reports of agency experiences with ECEs and held a debrief with agency staff who completed Go NAP SACCs. Nvivo 10.0 software was used for coding and theme analysis.

**Mixing Methods**
After all analyses were completed, quantitative and qualitative findings were triangulated to identify ECEs’ wellness-related needs, barriers, and opportunities.

Results
Agencies collected Go NAP SACC assessments from 40 ECEs in 10 counties. Triangulated data revealed these emergent themes:

- **Greater need for physical activity vs. nutrition support.** Lower physical activity scores (Figures 1a-b) were corroborated by narrative reports (Figure 3).
- **Recognized need for family education and professional development of ECE staff** (Figures 1, 2). Narratives revealed that ECEs sought training specific to Empower standards but that barriers sometimes inhibited progress (Figure 3).
- **Unrecognized need for improved policy.** The need to improve written ECE policies identified in Figures 1a-b was not addressed in normative reports.

**Conclusion**
This study revealed a need to improve written policies, family education, and professional staff development at ECEs. When ECE time and resources are limited, Arizona’s SNAP-Ed agencies may wish to prioritize physical activity programming and Empower Trainings.

**References**

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