



news release

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Wellmark Foundation Grant to Support Obesity Prevention Program for Youth in South Dakota Child Care Centers

(DES MOINES, IOWA) – The South Dakota Department of Health in Pierre, S.D., received a \$150,000 two-year grant from The Wellmark Foundation to develop a childhood obesity prevention initiative targeting children ages 2-5 years in child care settings. The South Dakota Departments of Health, Social Services and Education will collaborate to assist South Dakota child care facilities to make improvements in nutrition and physical activity practices, policies and environments.

Fit from the Start aims to reduce obesity and children’s risk for developing obesity by encouraging healthy child care environments, explains Linda Ahrendt, administrator, Office of Health Promotion, South Dakota Department of Health. “This initiative will focus on improving access to vegetables, increasing opportunities for exercise, and reducing access to television viewing in children 2-5 years of age in child care settings,” says Ahrendt.

The initiative, which will provide training and education to staff at 200 licensed child care facilities across the state, will strive to foster behavior changes in child care providers, thereby promoting change among children in their care and also the children’s parents. A training tool adapted from the Nutrition and Physical Activity Self Assessment for Child Care will be used to support *Fit from the Start* implementation.

Early Childhood Enrichment Centers and South Dakota Cooperative Extension Educators will collaborate to provide training to participating child care providers, and to conduct a comprehensive program evaluation. For more information on *Fit from the Start*, contact Linda Ahrendt at linda.ahrendt@state.sd.us or 605-773-3737.

The Wellmark Foundation has provided nearly \$14.7 million to fund 406 health-related grants in Iowa and South Dakota since 1997, including \$1,739,233 this cycle. “The Wellmark Foundation collaborates with non-profit and governmental organizations in Iowa and South Dakota to positively impact the health outcomes of individuals and communities in our states,” says Matthew McGarvey, director of The Wellmark Foundation. “This statewide childhood obesity prevention program will impact hundreds of South Dakota children and their families, leading them toward more active and healthy lifestyles,” says McGarvey.

The Wellmark Foundation is a private, non-profit foundation created by Wellmark, Inc., doing business as Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Iowa. Due to the Foundation's recent significant support toward disaster relief efforts, the timeline for the second 2008 community responsive grant cycle has been modified. Letters of Interest (LOIs) are now due on September 23, 2008. Learn more about this funding opportunity during a grant applicant teleconference on July 21, 2008. For teleconference and LOI details, visit the Foundation's Web site at www.wellmark.com/foundation. Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield and The Wellmark Foundation are independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.