



Date: July 30, 2010

Re: Overview of Main Findings HEAC and CCROPP Policymaker Survey

Samuels & Associates and The California Endowment commissioned Field Research to survey public officials from the California counties participating in Healthy Eating Active Communities (HEAC) and the Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program (CCROPP). The goal was to assess policymaker attitudes on obesity, their support for policy initiatives, and recent efforts to affect environmental change in the HEAC and CCROPP areas.

The survey findings show strong support for government action on obesity. We present the key findings according to The California Endowment's (TCE) policy priority areas. The findings may be used to inform policy development and implementation at the local state, and federal levels, inform stakeholders and allies, address opposition messages, and respond strategically to policy and funding opportunities as they arise. The findings provide direction on nutrition and physical activity policy areas and identify where traction may be gained in the short and longer-term.

METHODS

Data were collected during March-April 2010. Respondents were mailed the survey questionnaire but also had the opportunity to complete the survey via the web. A special list of 880 policymakers was developed for the study. It included U.S. congressional representatives from the HEAC and CCROPP counties; state senators and assembly members; supervisors, health officers and other county officials; mayors, city council members and other officials; school board members, superintendents and other school officials; as well as members of regional governing bodies from the relevant counties.

206 policymakers responded to the survey, 24%.: 110 were from the eight CCROPP counties and 96 were from the six HEAC communities.

Characteristics of Responders

- There was roughly equal representation across the county, municipal and school sectors, especially in HEAC; in CCROPP, the municipal representatives were somewhat over-represented—44% of respondents were from the municipal level. No congressional, and only a handful of state legislators (4), responded.



- Two thirds of respondents were the officials themselves; the rest were staff members.
- The HEAC sample was 47% Democratic (28% Republican, the balance was “other”); the CCROPP sample was 46 % Republican (26% Democratic, balance “other”).
- In terms of ideology, liberals were the largest group in HEAC (42%), while conservatives were the largest group in CCROPP (43%).
- About one-third of HEAC sample said they were *very* focused on health issues; in CCROPP, it was about one-quarter; the largest groups in both said they were *somewhat* focused on health (45%).

OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

Primary Cause of Obesity: Individual or Environmental Level?

- The majority point to the individual, but it is a bigger majority in the CCROPP area: 76% of CCROPP policymakers versus 54% of HEAC policymakers.
- How much of a cause is the environment? Forty-one percent of CCROPP policymakers see a consequential environmental influence but only 20% give it weight equal to, or greater than, the individual. On the HEAC side, it is different: 59% see a consequential environmental influence with 43% giving it equal or greater weight.

Support for Government Action

- Despite party and ideological differences, there is overwhelming support for government action on the obesity issue in both samples: 88% of HEAC policymakers and 73% of CCROPP policymakers.
- The intensity of support is greater among HEAC policymakers; 57% of HEAC policymakers *strongly* favor government action as opposed to only 39% of CCROPP policymakers.

Doing Enough?

- The majority (58%) of HEAC policymakers believe that their agency or policy body is doing the right amount on the obesity issue; 38% believe they are doing too little.



- The reverse is true in the CCROPP area: 50% of CCROPP policymakers believe they are doing too little; only 38% say they are doing enough.

Act Now or Wait for Economic Recovery?

- Half (50%) of CCROPP policymakers believe that government spending on the issue should await economic recovery; the other half disagree or are not sure. Only 35% of HEAC policymakers want to wait; 56% took the opposing view.

Moving the Agenda Forward: What's Possible in the Short Run?

Some items on the public health agenda draw broader support than others. Some are also viewed as more likely or possible within the next few years given fiscal and political realities.

School Food and Beverage Policies

- There is extremely broad support among both HEAC and CCROPP policymakers for providing access to free and safe drinking in schools (94%, CCROPP; 97%, HEAC). Some policymakers already report action in this area: 21% in HEAC and 20% in CCROPP. Of the rest, a majority think progress is either likely or possible in the next few years (62%, CCROPP; 63%, HEAC).
- Majorities were somewhat smaller (but still big) in support of banning the sale of unhealthy foods in schools in California (76%, CCROPP; 82%, HEAC). Some report that steps have already been taken (40%, HEAC; 19%, CCROPP). Opinions of the rest are divided, however, on how possible this is in the next few years; 53% in CCROPP and significantly fewer in HEAC, 44%, believe action is at least possible.
- There was broad support from policymakers in both areas for a federal ban on the sale of unhealthy foods in schools (66%, CCROPP; 70%, HEAC) and funding improvements in school meals (79%, CCROPP; 91%, HEAC). More think the school meal measure is possible (69%, CCROPP, 62%, HEAC) than the ban on unhealthy foods (48%, CCROPP; 46%, HEAC).
- These data suggest that policymakers are less supportive of initiatives that restrict personal choice. This is a pattern throughout the data.



Community Healthy Food Access

- There is very broad support among both HEAC and CCROPP policymakers for the setting of nutrition standards for government run programs (79%, CCROPP; 88%, HEAC). Plus, big majorities see this as possible (70 %, CCROPP; 71%, HEAC)
- The same is true for zoning changes to encourage gardens and farmer's markets (69%, CCROPP; 82%, HEAC). Some report already taking steps in this area (16%, HEAC; 7%, CCROPP). Of the rest, a majority thinks it is possible in the next few years (62%, CCROPP; 60%, HEAC)
- Federal requirements for the posting of calorie information on menus were also broadly supported (66%, CCROPP; 84%, HEAC). Many also thought this was possible in the next few years (59%, CCROPP; 67%, HEAC, significantly more.) There was a calorie posting provision in the recently passed health care reform legislation.
- Grocery store incentive programs are more problematic, at least in more conservative locales. Support seems to be broad (68%, CCROPP; 85%, HEAC) but fewer see it as possible in the current fiscal and political environment (49%, CCROPP; 62%, HEAC, significantly more.)

Fast Food Limits

- Opinions are divided on the wisdom of limiting the density of fast food outlets (36% support, CCROPP; 57%, HEAC) and restricting fast food access near schools (32% support, CCROPP; 49%, HEAC).
- Also, neither step is viewed as possible in the short run. On limiting the density of fast food outlets, only 34% of CCROPP and 37%, of HEAC policymakers responded affirmatively on the feasibility question. On restricting fast food access near schools, only 28% of CCROPP and 29% of HEAC policymakers responded affirmatively.

Sweetened Beverage Tax/Fee

- Opinions are also divided on a tax or fee on sugar-sweetened beverages (41% support, CCROPP; 58%, HEAC). Only a minority see it as possible in the next few years (43%, CCROPP; 47%, HEAC).

Marketing Restrictions

- While there is broad support for eliminating the marketing of unhealthy foods to youth among HEAC policymakers (63%, HEAC vs. 37% CCROPP), relatively few policymakers see it as possible in the next few years (33% CCROPP; 41%, HEAC, significantly more).

Physical Activity/Joint Use

- There is very broad support among both HEAC and CCROPP policymakers for enforcing PE laws and fully funding programs (88% CCROPP, 95% HEAC). Moreover, big majorities see this as possible in the next few years (68%, CCROPP; 64%, HEAC).
- The establishment of joint-use policies is also very broadly supported (98% in both). Some have already taken steps to move the policy forward (38%, HEAC; 38%, CCROPP). However, barely half of the rest see progress as possible in the next few years (51%, both).
- There is reasonably broad support for limiting screen time in pre-school and other youth service settings (56%, CCROPP; 67%, HEAC) but fewer see this as possible in the next few years (44%, CCROPP; 53%, HEAC, significantly more.)

Land Use/Transportation

- There is very broad support among both HEAC and CCROPP policymakers for building sidewalks and street crossings (94% CCROPP, 99% HEAC), retrofitting streets (82% CCROPP, 94% HEAC), developing off-street trails (93% CCROPP, 96% HEAC) and building parks and playgrounds in neighborhoods (96% CCROPP, 97% HEAC).
- Some have already taken steps to move the above policies forward. On parks and playgrounds, 39% in HEAC and 39% in CCROPP; on sidewalks, 31% in HEAC and 22% in CCROPP; on retrofitting streets, 24% in HEAC and 16% in CCROPP; on off-street trails, 23% in HEAC and 27% in CCROPP.
- The majority of those who have not yet acted think two of the initiatives are possible now: building sidewalks and street crossings (58%, CCROPP; 56%, HEAC) and developing off-street trails (51%, both). The other policies seem to be more problematic in the short run: retrofitting streets (49% in CCROPP and 44% in HEAC viewing it as possible) and building parks and playgrounds (47% in CCROPP and 44% in HEAC.) It may be that the latter two involve more cost.



- Transportation is more of a mixed bag. There is broad support for increased federal funding for alternative transportation (79% CCROPP; 92%, HEAC) and big majorities view this as possible (67%, CCROPP; 64%, HEAC). At the state and local level in California, there is also very broad support for promoting increased transit use (80% CCROPP, 94% HEAC). Opinions are divided, however on its feasibility; 51% in CCROPP think the California effort is possible compared to only 38% in HEAC, significantly fewer. The HEAC/CCROPP difference is interesting in that it shows greater pessimism among the urban policymakers.

Safety/Violence Prevention

- There is overwhelmingly broad support among both HEAC and CCROPP policymakers for the improvement of safety in open spaces (94%, CCROPP; 95%, HEAC). Some have already taken steps (25%, HEAC; 21%, CCROPP). The majority see this as possible in the next few years (64%, CCROPP; 55%, HEAC, significantly fewer.)

Funding for Wellness Programs

- There was broad support from policymakers in both areas for increasing funding for community wellness programs (73%, CCROPP; 88%, HEAC). Moreover, sizeable majorities see this as possible to accomplish (63%, CCROPP; 65%, HEAC).

Partisan and Ideological Differences

- There are clear partisan and ideological differences on the issue. Democrats, liberals and middle-of-the-roaders are most likely to take the public health position while Republicans and conservatives are significantly less likely.

Perceptions about Voter Attitudes

- The majority of CCROPP policymakers (51%) say that the majority of voters support *some* of the above policies; only 30% say *all or most* of the policies
- In the HEAC areas, the majority (54%) says that the majority of voters support *all or most* of the policies; 35% say voters support only *some* of the policies
- The majority of both groups detect little voter interest in the issue: 58% of HEAC policymakers and 76% of CCROPP policymakers said voters never or only rarely raise it or do so less than most other issues.



- 70% of HEAC policymakers believe that voters care more about the issue now than in previous years compared with only 46% of CCROPP policymakers



CONCLUSION

The survey findings suggest that policymakers support a variety of policy proposals for obesity prevention. Although the findings point to some regional differences in levels of support for specific policy proposals, the majority of policy initiatives included in the survey have the support of policymakers in the HEAC and CCROPP communities.