

Ideas: Grass Root Public Wellness Program

Why Grass-Root Public Wellness Program?

The cost of medical care of the Obesity and related diseases such as Type2 diabetes and Heart disease is so high that it is expected to bankrupt health care funds of even the most advanced wealthiest nations in the world. In India, most health care costs get handled by individuals and their families. The high health care costs of these lifelong diseases end up devastating many families. The financial burden of the cost of sick care and loss of productivity is the biggest threat to the economic progress of developing nations like India.

The health care challenges of India lie at the two extreme ends of the spectrum. On the one hand, India has the highest numbers of malnourished, impoverished children and on the other hand, a fast-growing epidemic of overweight and obesity in urban children. The obese city children will eventually go on to become obese adults; have Type 2 diabetes, and heart disease at a much younger age, adding further to the burden of these diseases.

Logically, as well as morally Indian Government's priorities lie with addressing malnutrition, eliminating Childhood poverty, education, and sanitation.

Therefore, the most effective sensible solution to handle India's obesity, Type2 diabetes, and many related disease crisis is to bring preventive efforts to the community, school, and the corporate sectors. The Governments at the central, state, and municipality level can assist with critical Policy and Legislative action using only a fraction of the allocated national healthcare funds.

The concept of a decentralized grass-root level approach would work very well moving forward. That is in consideration of the expected growth in communication via mass media and digital technology. By 2023, the number of internet users may grow to be 1 billion, with a parallel increase in cell phone users. Both communication techniques are cost-effective tools to propagate messages across broad sectors of the population. An excellent example has been amazing civic responsibility messages disseminated by the Department of environmental safety (Paryavaran department of the Government of India), and messages on curbing the habits of tobacco and beetle nut by the health ministry. It is time to mount a similar mass-messaging campaign to eliminate the burgeoning epidemics of food and lifestyle diseases like Type2 diabetes and Heart disease via adopting Food and Lifestyle balance.

Four Essential Goals of Grass-Root Wellness Program

1. *Education and awareness of the cause and impact of typical food and lifestyle diseases such as Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and Heart disease.*
2. *How to Preserve Health and Prevent Diseases via " Food and Lifestyle Balance."*
(Note: Refer to the section of Holistic Food and Balance Lifestyle on the website)

The aim is to educate the population regards, making sensible choices in buying and eating healthy foods, and living lifestyle which sustains robust health. Food safety is a significant issue around the world and more so in developing nations like India. The Governments at the central and state level have to boost efforts to ensure food safety, food purity, and healthy food availability via appropriate Policy and legislation. A good example is to subsidize the farmers for growing more fresh produce such as vegetables and fruits. Eliminate the middle man between the farmer and the public, so the healthy clean food becomes cheaper and easily accessible. Under the current circumstances of commercial food abundance and promotion, the communities in India require a broader message on healthy foods disseminated via state health authorities and the leaders of the local grass-roots movement. The greatest threat to the population health currently is nutritionally deficient commercial foods and sugary drinks. The public awareness of this issue should be front and center.

3. *Expansion of healthy food markets* -Educated, digitally connected consumers better informed on “What to eat and buy” can also tap on to the broader distant markets to get the best value and quality on the foods. That will bring competition and boost the healthy eating and wellness industry with smart players in the new e-commerce market. The players in the food industry with the right products are set to make significant gains from educated, digitally connected consumers. The leaders of the grass-roots movement can help by providing proper guidance regards food quality, optimal pricing, and easy procurement.
4. *Creating Public-Private Partnerships to eliminate rogue actors in the food industry*--The Indian markets are vast, the human resources to monitor food safety limited, and the regulations limited in scope. Therefore, most work on food safety and food quality will become the responsibility of well informed, educated customers, and the grass-root leaders at the community level.

“ Finally, a simple formula which always works is; the best way to eat healthily is to stop buying unhealthy. The markets have no choice but to follow customer lead. Just remember that Public awareness and preference have been the driving force behind the vast organic food movement across the world.”

Meeting the Goals of the Public Wellness Program:

1. Public Education- This should focus on knowledge Regards:

- What food and lifestyle habits are the cause of overweight, obesity, and related disorders such as Metabolic syndrome (Prediabetes), Type2 diabetes, and Heart disease.
- What is the impact of these diseases on long term health
- What is the approximate cost of sick care under the current health systems?
- What are the strategies to prevent and reverse these diseases – Healthy foods, balanced lifestyles, and Physical activity/exercise

(Note: The website carries the information on all the above subjects)

2. Early detection of the disease by periodic screening

Awareness regards early detection of the disease is a vital requirement of a grass-root wellness program. Early detection of diseases such as Type2 diabetes allows for an early intervention with food and lifestyle behavior change to reverse the disease. Prevention and reversal of disease come at a fraction of the cost of the sick care of the condition. Early detection programs comprise of simple strategies such as:

- Weight and waistline line measurement.
- The Blood Pressure, and Heart rate measurements.
- A finger-prick blood test for sugar and cholesterol levels.

3. The players in a Public Wellness Program

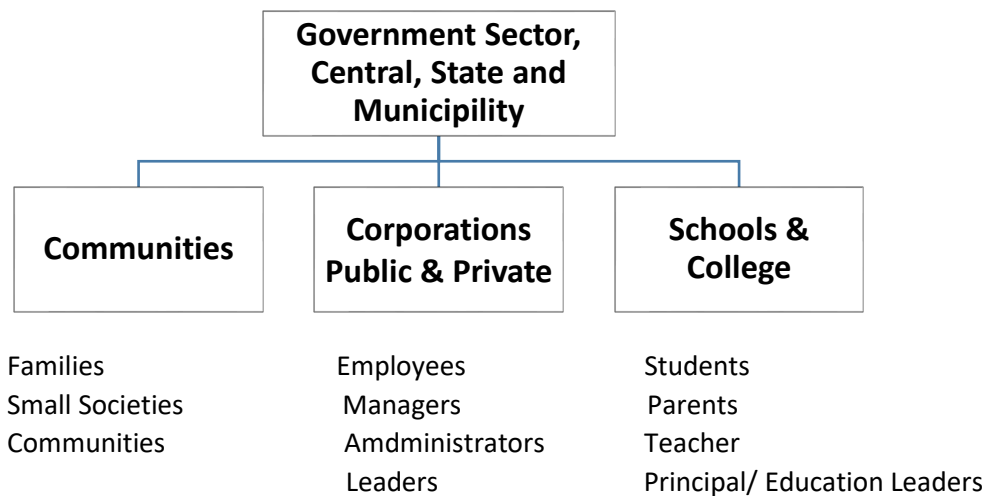
The communities in the peripheral sector remain the major players in the Public Wellness Program. The legislators at the government and state-level work in the assisting/supportive role. The players in the Wellness Program include the individuals and leaders from the following four sectors:

1. *The Government sector in the supportive role*

2. *Community Sector-* Comprising of Families and small Societies and larger Communities.

3. *Education Sector (Schools and Colleges)* - Comprising of Students, Parents, Teachers, Administrators, Supervisors, and Education leaders at the top level.

4. *Corporate sector (Public and Private)* - Comprising of Employees, Managers. Administrators, and Leaders.



How the Government Sector can help using a fraction of Healthcare Budget

World Health Organization (WHO) in its study project of 2011, provided the global healthcare leaders a “ Best Buy “ Wellness model for cost-effective prevention and reversal of obesity and related diseases. For “ Lower-Middle-Income countries” like India, the cost of “ Best Buy” model for prevention and reversal of obesity and related diseases was calculated to be \$1.50 (INR 100-150)/ person/year. An ideal setting for such a cost-effective Wellness model could be at grass root Public-Private sector. The peripheral areas can function independently to minimize bureaucracy and enhance accountability. The governmental sector can play a critical role in assisting the three Public-Private programs with the Policy and Legislative actions as and when necessary.

What Government can do with a louder and stronger voice

It is well known that revolutionary changes in the societies and nations come when Public and Private sectors work in partnership. Government at central, state, and municipality level can implement policies and actions to boost health education of masses via mass communication/ messaging. Government of India has run successful mass campaigns against for tobacco, beetle nut chewing, alcohol, and promoting sanitation – clean India efforts. Similar mass campaigns are the need of the hour to make public aware of the cause of high-cost food and lifestyle diseases such as obesity, Type2 diabetes, and Heart disease.

Healthcare policies which have and can bring results at the national level include:

- Smoking ban in public places.
- Prohibit the advertisement of products such as tobacco, alcohol, and sugary beverages like soda and sports drinks which are a danger to public health. The celebrities must consider it their moral and social responsibility not to endorse products, which have become health hazards for children and young adults.
- Ban the advertising of unhealthy fast and junks foods rich in refined sugars and packaged goods rich in salt, fat, and sugars
- Build or organize safe public places for physical activity- Safe, walkable footpaths, bicycle paths, green zones, and parks. While building highways is great for commerce, creating safe places for walking and movement are the highways of the future health of the masses. Assigning a fraction of the infrastructure budget to enhance such spaces for the public certainly will pay high dividends in creating healthy societies and saving healthcare costs for future generations.

World Health Organization Message (2011 Meeting) **“The governments and communities who spend a fraction on food care and preventive care will save a fortune on sick care of the masses.”**

- Mandate and fund physical education and sports in schools and colleges- Active, healthy children become healthy, productive adults and raise the next generation of healthy productive children.

The prestigious medical journal Lancet in 2011, published a study entitled “ Changing the future of obesity: Science, Policy, and action” four cost-effective governmental policy interventions for the prevention of overweight obesity and associated diseases identified were:

1. Taxes on Unhealthy foods
2. Taxes on Sugary beverages (Soda Tax)
3. Front of the box warning – called Traffic light warning of Red, Yellow, and Green on packaged foods to identify health risks of the food (red being danger signal- No go, and green being – healthy go).
4. A campaign to reduce advertisement for dangerous foods and beverage- That includes television, cartoon characters, billboards on streets and highways and finally celebrity endorsements.

Hopefully, the celebrities will honor their social responsibility of promoting the health and wellbeing of the population, especially impressionable children and young adults by not endorsing unhealthy foods and sugary drinks including boxed fruit juices.

Note: For the ideas on Grass- Root Wellness Programs at Community, School, and Public-Private corporate level refer to these sections on the website.

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