

# **Nutrition & Physical Activity Needs Assessment**

**Portage County, OH  
2017**



## **Executive Summary**

Analysis of the 2016 Portage County Community Health Assessment (CHA) data resulted in the determination of decreasing obesity as one of five priority areas of focus in the 2016-2019 Portage County Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP). Nutrition and physical activity are primary factors related to this priority. As such, and in an effort to gather additional relevant data beyond that found in the CHA, a nutrition and physical activity community assessment was conducted using the “Moving to the Future: Nutrition and Physical Activity Program Planning” modules. Areas of the assessment included: defining the community (i.e., population profile, and a nutrition and physical activity profile), community environment (i.e., community environment and resources, programs and services), and community opinion (i.e., media survey, expert opinion, and community opinion). Ohio Department of Health Maternal and Child Health grant primarily funded this report, but the process would not have been possible without the assistance of multiple agencies within Portage County. As with any assessment process, there are limitations to the process. Of all the areas measured, the public opinion response rate was extremely low and threatens potential validity to responses reported.

Nutrition faculty and graduate students at Kent State University collected data for the community assessment. The data contained in this assessment were gathered from retrospective data collected by multiple entities and from original data collection and analysis. Natalie Caine-Bish, PhD, RD, LD spearheaded the assessment and gathered a coalition group named the Portage County Nutrition and Physical Activity Coalition (PCNPA) including members: Natalie Caine-Bish, KSU Nutrition; Amy Cooper, Portage County WIC; Karen Towne, Portage County Combined General Health District; Becky Lehman, Portage County Combined General Health District; Kellie-Jo Jefferies; Portage County Job and Family Services; Christine Craycroft, Portage Parks District; and Andrea Metzler, Portage Parks District.

The current environment in Portage County is not conducive to factors that support healthy habits and lifestyles, such as healthy eating and physical fitness. The majority of residents in Portage County live in neighborhoods without sidewalks. There is a lack of connectivity between the communities and residential areas. Residents of Portage County also drive long distances to work, have high-calorie/high-fat foods in the workplace, and have access to many fast foods or take out restaurants in their communities. Overall, the assessment found the most “at-risk” population were children under 12 years old whereby 21% of the children between 6-11 years old are categorized as obese and less than half of these same children are physically active five days per week. Food insecurity in this population was also found to be 8% higher than the state food insecurity rate for this age of 15%. Using these data, the coalition decided to prioritize initial programming initiatives for families with children 12 years and younger. From the assessment data, the PCNPA coalition also determined areas of programming strength within the county included the opportunity for collaboration with the Portage Parks District for physical activity programming and the Center for Nutrition Outreach at Kent State University for nutrition education programming.

## Defining the Community Portage County, OH



For the purposes of this community assessment, the target population for this assessment was the pediatric population, which is defined by the American Academy of Pediatrics as “the specialty of medical science concerned with the physical, mental, and social health of children from birth to young adulthood.”

This target population was chosen as a result of the Ohio Department of Health Maternal and Child Health grant guidelines. The assessment was completed in Portage County, Ohio, which is considered a suburban county covering 504 square miles with a total population of 163,862 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013), with 21% of the county population being under

18 years of age and an additional 15.6% of the population being between the ages of 18-24 years. Approximately 47% of the population in Portage County is families with children under the age of 18 years with the average family size of 3.1 people. Because of the three higher education establishments found in Portage County, 46.7% of school enrollment for the county is undergraduate and graduate students of which the majority are categorized as pediatric (between the ages of 18-21 years). The median household income for Portage County is \$68,270, but it should be noted that approximately 15.6% of the county population is living in poverty and 31.3% of the population is living <200% of the Federal Poverty Level (Ohio Poverty Report, 2017).

# Community Data Findings

## Population Profile Data

**Table 1. Population Profile Statistics for the Portage County Pediatric Population Residing in Portage County Ohio\***

Age	Community		State
	Number	Percent (%)	%
Under 5	7,548	4.7	6.1
5 to 17	24,701	15.3	17.1
18 to 24	26,323	16.3	9.6
25 and above	102,981	63.7	67.2
<b>Ethnicity**</b>			
Hispanic/Latino	2,395	1.5	3.6
White	148,225	91.8	82.7
American Indian	242	.1	.3
Asian	2860	1.8	2.1
Other	536	.3	
Two or more races	3250	2.0	2.1
<b>Household Type</b>			
w/children under 18 years	22,026	32.3	31.7
Female householder, no husband	6,887	10.1	12.1
<b>Poverty</b>			
Under 18 years	5,734	18.4	22.7
Under 18 in families	3,864	16.3	20.8
Children in families that receive public assistance	***	28%	***
<b>Food Insecurity</b>			
Under 18 years	***	23.2	14.8

\*Data from U.S. Census Bureau, 2013, Portage County Community Health Status Assessment, 2016 and Ohio Poverty Report, 2017

\*\*Data is for total population in Portage County, Ohio. No data available for pediatric only population.

\*\*\*Missing Data

## **Nutrition and Physical Activity Profile**

The most complete data set available for weight status is from 2009 data collection in Portage County (n=653) (See Table 2 below). More current data of children between the ages of 10-18 year demonstrated a rate of overweight of 15% and a rate of obesity of 15% and a rate of 21% categorized as obese in children between the ages of 6-11 years (Portage County Health District, 2016). The prevalence of overweight in children participating in WIC programming in Portage County between the ages of 2 to <5 years is approximately 16% and obese in this age range is approximately 12% (Ohio Department of Health, 2016).

**Table 2. Mean BMI Percentiles for Children and Adolescents in Portage County (n=653)**

<b>County Statistics</b>	<b>Below 85th % Normal Weight</b>	<b>86th-94th% Overweight</b>	<b>95th% + Obese</b>
Overall	60.96	30.97	8.08
Boys	59.53	31.62	8.85
Girls	62.23	30.09	7.69
Grade K	68.80	23.13	8.07
Grade 3	59.62	33.26	7.12
Grade 7	58.08	34.45	7.47
Grade 9	57.81	32.46	9.73

**(June, 2009)**

## **Key Nutrition Data**

- Eighty-one percent of adolescents between the ages of 12-19 years consume 1-4 fruits or vegetables per day (Portage Health District, 2016). Only 13% ate more than 5 serving per day.
- Eighty percent of children ages 5-11 years consume 1-4 servings of fruit and vegetables each day (Portage Health District, 2016). This is 5% above the state rate.
- Child Food Insecurity Rate in Portage County is 23.2%; the state of Ohio rate is 14.8% (Akron Canton Food Bank 2016).
- There is no current funding for nutrition and physical activity programming at the local level except for the Maternal Child Health grant from the Ohio Department of Health. The Center for Nutrition Outreach does run nutrition programming for the community as the budget allows.

## **Key Physical Activity Data**

- Approximately 1/3 (32%) of adolescents between the ages of 12-19 years are physically active every day for at least 60 minutes (Portage Health District, 2016). This is higher than the state average of 26%, but below national recommendations of every day for 60 minutes or more.

## **Current Nutrition and Physical Activity Programming in Portage County**

- MightyPack program: Food is currently distributed through schools and community centers during the school year to children to bridge the gap of the National School Lunch Program. Approximate average of 38 bags per week for 46 weeks of the year to any community center or school district that requests the bags. This program is offered through the Kent State University Center for Nutrition Outreach.
- Birdie Bags: Kent City School food distribution 4 times per year to food insecure children K-12. This program is offered through the Ben Curtis Foundation and is only offered to Kent City School children.
- KIDS Camp: Free weight management program for children and adolescents provided by the Center for Nutrition Outreach at Kent State University.
- Healthy Kids Running Series: Kent State University's Center for Nutrition Outreach is sponsoring the Healthy Kids Running Series to be brought to Portage County. Races will be for five weeks in Spring of 2018 and will be organized with educational and community health engagement opportunities for parents each week. A pilot race was run in September of 2016 to determine a course and sustainability.
- Kent and Ravenna Parks and Recreation as well as other townships in the county have physical activity programming for pre-K through middle school age in the form of organized sports including: soccer, baseball, softball, dance, football, volleyball, cross country, karate, basketball, lacrosse, and track.

Programming previously offered to Portage County through Kent State University's Center for Nutrition Outreach, but funding is currently not available.

- Munch Bunch Program: Fruit and Vegetable Education during lunchtime at local schools.
- Kids in the Kitchen: Dietitian led family cooking and nutrition education program.
- Individual Nutrition Services: Services for families with children with nutritional issues that cannot be solved in other group programming initiatives.
- 4321 Physical Activity/Nutrition communication campaign through schools.

## **Community Environment**

- Portage County consists of 4 cities, 18 townships, and 7 villages.
- There are eleven school districts in Portage County. These include: Aurora City Schools, Crestwood Local Schools, Field Local Schools, Garfield Local Schools, Kent City Schools, Ravenna City Schools, Rootstown Local Schools, Streetsboro City Schools, Southeast Local Schools, Waterloo Local Schools, and Windham Local Schools. Portage County also has a vocational school called Maplewood Career Center that is located in Ravenna. The high school graduation rate for Portage County is 91.4%.
- Portage County has three higher learning institutions. These include Kent State University located in Kent, Hiram College located in Hiram Township, and Northeast Ohio Medical University (NEOMED) located in Rootstown.
- Portage County is located in northeast Ohio. It is bisected in the east to west direction by I-80 (Ohio Turnpike) and I-76 and US route 224. I-76 provides easy access to the north to south routes of I-77 and I-71. Portage County is accessible to the Cleveland metro area by I-480. Within one hour of transportation, residents of Portage County can reach airports in Akron-Canton, Cleveland, and Youngstown. The western portion of Portage County consisting of Aurora, Kent, and Streetsboro are urban areas culturally aligned to the Cleveland suburbs. The southeastern portion of Portage County consisting of Edinburg, Palmyra, Atwater, Deerfield, and Paris townships are culturally aligned to Mahoning Valley. The east section of Portage County is literally divided in half by a completely fenced-in 21,418 acre area called the Ravenna Army Ammunition Plant or the Ravenna Arsenal. This area is made from the two original sites of the Portage Ordnance Depot and the Ravenna Ordnance Plant. The Ravenna Arsenal was built during World War II in 1941. This fenced-in area makes it impossible to travel directly from Windham to the Southeast district.

### **Important Findings Related to Nutrition Environment:**

- Rate of Farmer's Market Availability below state average (.019 per 1000 residents for Portage County versus .034 for the state of Ohio).
- WIC redemption and SNAP redemption sites below state average (.57 per 1000 residents for Portage County versus .74 for the state of Ohio).
- Much of Portage County is considered part of a food desert because of the lack of available grocery stores for the populations residing within the county (USDA, 2015).
- There are four major Farmer's markets available seasonally in Portage County. Only Haymakers Farmer's Market in Kent is open year round.
- Currently, no dietitian services are available on an outpatient basis in Portage County. The Center for Nutrition Outreach at Kent State University will see community members, but there is only one dietitian staffed part-time to do so.

- One assistant is available to the county from Cooperative Extension funding. The only programming related to nutrition is an education program for adults with children to teach food preparation safety and nutrition.
- There are 16 different food pantries in the county ranging in size. All are based out of non-profit or religious institutions.
- Summer meal programs are available in the cities of Ravenna, Kent and in Windham Exempted Village.

### **Important Findings Related to Physical Activity Environment:**

- There are six parks and recreational operations in Portage County. They are Brimfield Parks and Recreation, Aurora Parks and Recreation, Kent Parks and Recreation, Ravenna Parks and Recreation, Streetsboro Parks and Recreation, and Portage Parks District. They are located in the township of Brimfield and the cities of Aurora, Kent, Ravenna, and Streetsboro. Within Portage County, there are three state parks. They are Nelson-Kennedy Ledges State Park, West Branch State Park, and Tinkers Creek State Park. There are also 23 community parks within Portage County. Many of the parks surround the lakes and rivers. These include Aurora Pond, Berlin Lake, Cuyahoga River, Lake Hodgson, Lake Rockwell, Michael Kirwan, and Mogadore Reservoir. West Branch State Park is an 8,002-acre wildlife area. It offers the general public fishing, boating, and hunting recreation.
- There are numerous fitness and wellness centers in the county, but none allow for physical activity participation except for public swimming times in the facilities' community pools.

### **Media Survey Data**

- No local media data was found to target children and adolescents. The largest two media outlets found that gave nutrition and physical activity information targeted to children and adolescents that was used by local youth were the social media sites for Cosmopolitan magazine, Seventeen, and Teen Vogue. The nutrition information tracked on these sites over a week included a combined 16 posts on their social media sites related to nutrition and none of physical activity.
- Local newspapers (Akron Beacon Journal & Record Courier) were tracked for two weeks in the spring. Only two articles related to child nutrition were found. Both articles were related to the National School Lunch Program.
- Kent Wired, a local online magazine, was also tracked. Seven articles over a two-week period were found; four of the seven articles related to the availability in the local food environment and the other three related to specific nutritional issues. None were pediatric-focused.

## Community Opinion

A survey was distributed throughout Portage County, Ohio. Unfortunately, only 20 individual surveys were returned. The average age of respondents was 27 years. Eight respondents were male and 12 were female. One third of respondents had children. The average income of respondents was between \$20,000 and \$30,000. The majority (75%) of respondents are living alone. Only one respondent had a child participating in the free and reduced lunch and only one participant was currently enrolled in Medicaid.

The respondents were asked a variety of questions regarding their participation and importance of nutrition and physical activity. Table 3 below depicts the mean responses.

Table 3. Mean Responses to Public Opinion Survey for Portage County Nutrition and Physical Activity Assessment

Statement	Mean
Physical activity is important to me	4.5
Physical activity is important to kids	4.5
Good nutrition is important to me	4.4
Good nutrition is important to kids	4.5
Portage County has programming for physical activity for me	3.2
Portage County has programming for physical activity for kids	3.5
Portage County has programming to teach nutrition for me	3.4
I would like to see more physical activity programming for me in Portage County	3.6
I would like to see more physical activity programming in Portage County for kids	4.0
I would like to see more nutrition programming in Portage County for me	3.5
I would like to see more nutrition in Portage County for kids	4.0

\*Respondents were asked to respond to these statements on a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree).

Respondents were also asked qualitative questions. Responses were themed for each question using qualitative data analysis techniques. Below lists the questions and themed responses.

1. What kind of physical activity programming would you be most interested in?
  - More Runs and 5ks that include kids or are family oriented (n=5)
  - More specific programming that is accessible and low cost (i.e., kickboxing, yoga, tennis) (n=8)
2. What kind of nutrition programming would you be most interested in?
  - Cooking classes (n=8)
  - No preference (n=4)
  - Chronic disease-related classes (n=3)

- Classes that are user friendly and I can understand information (n=3)
  - Sports-related (n=1)
3. What kind of physical activity programming do you think kids would be most interested in?
    - Non-competitive game or field days (n=10)
    - Running groups (n=5)
    - Don't know (n=3)
  4. What kind of nutrition programming do you think kids would be most interested in?
    - Don't know (n=2)
    - Interactive (n=2)
    - Cooking (n=8)
    - Games (n=2)

Focus groups of experts in different agencies were also conducted. These included professionals from Jobs and Family Services, local non-profit agencies, WIC, CHIP participants, Portage County Health District, and Park Services. The following themes were found.

- We have to meet clients where they are. Put programming in areas where programs don't exist and there won't be transportation issues.
- Our clients need to know how to use food. They don't know how to cook or shop.
- We need more family programming in the county.
- The families that are struggling financially need the most help in nutrition and physical activity programs.

## **Action Plan**

1. Leverage current collaborations to reduce cost of programming to necessary supplies only. The two major collaborators that will be leveraged include the Portage Parks District for physical activity programming because of the in-kind support of the assistance in programming and Kent State University Center for Nutrition Outreach for nutrition education programming. This will reduce the cost of programming to supply needs only. Once programs have demonstrated effectiveness through program assessments, then program outcomes will be brought to the coalition as well as the CHIP partners to strategize on sustainability. By partnering with these two organizations, the cost of any program will be supply need only, which may offer opportunities for growth and maintenance of programming.
2. Focus programming on the 12 years and under population because of the obesity levels, physical activity patterns, rate of childhood food insecurity as well as the nutrition patterns of adolescents. It is the hope to reach the pediatric population earlier to develop healthy behaviors earlier and reduce rates of obesity as well as improve dietary behaviors long-term.

3. Based on public opinion and expert opinion, more family programming and programming close to clients is important. The programs most residents and county organizations would like to see involve cooking skills and game-like or wellness-oriented physical activity experiences for kids and not more sport-specific programs.

Based on the three key points above as well as coalition discussions on feasibility and sustainability the following programs are suggested for development.

- Cooking classes for families and children
- Family oriented physical activity programs that increase movement and are focused on wellness and not sport-specific development
- Programs need to be available for the most at-risk populations for the county focusing primarily on accessibility and affordability