

## WEIGHT MANAGEMENT



### **Understanding the problem:**

Americans are in the throes of an epidemic of obesity, affecting children and adults alike. According to the Centers for Disease Control, approximately 30% of American adults report a Body Mass index (BMI) that exceeds 30%, the official marker of obesity. The number of people with a BMI of 40 or more — an indicator of severe obesity — has doubled in the past 15 years. Fully 16% of all American children and adolescents fall into these categories as well, and research demonstrates that obese children are significantly likely to carry the extra poundage with them through their adulthood.

Overweight and obesity are not merely cosmetic problems. Excess body weight is associated with myriad life-limiting and life-threatening health problems, including diabetes, heart disease, stroke, malnutrition, depression, and osteoarthritis.

### **Responding broadly:**

Kaiser Permanente's Care Management Institute (KP CMI), in concert with the eight KP regions, launched a Weight Management Initiative in January 2002 to develop and implement a plan to address overweight and obesity among members and share those approaches with the community at large. The initiative recognizes both the importance of effective clinical strategies to prevent and treat excess weight in adults and children and the critical role

# THE RIGHT THING



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*care management* institute

played by communities and the environment in preventing obesity and helping people maintain weight loss.

Weight management and obesity prevention require lasting lifestyle changes: as a result, the initiative emphasizes healthy lifestyle changes, rather than rapid weight loss. Providers play a key role in helping patients to thrive by offering advice and support. Nearly 1,000 KP clinicians and more than 1,000 community physicians have been trained on assessing BMI and communicating effectively with patients about making lifestyle changes. Tools like a BMI wheel, exam room posters, how-to guides for clinicians, and patient tip sheets and action plans supplement the training. A method for tracking BMI has also been built into KP's state-of-the-art electronic health records, KP HealthConnect.

Another part of the healthy living solution is to provide tools members can use outside an office visit. The Balance® program is a free, online interactive tool to help members manage their weight and improve their overall health. It provides a customized program and coaching by email. In the first six months, 45,000 KP members registered.

The 10,000 Steps® program, offered in conjunction with HealthPartners of Minnesota, provides a free pedometer and support through an Internet site. More than 19,000 members and 12,000 KP employees have signed up.

Several programs designed for children and teens, such as Operation Zero, Kidshape®, KP KIDS, and Teen Choices and Challenges, combine education about diet and exercise with problem-solving and behavior change strategies, empowering kids to make better choices.

**Taking a public health approach:**

KP CMI takes weight management into communities, too, addressing social and environmental factors contributing to overweight. At a dozen KP facilities, farmer's markets make fresh, local food available to members, employees, and communities; more are in the works. Educational Theatre programs bring messages about healthy eating and active living into schools in KP communities. A partnership with the TV Turnoff Network raises awareness of the weight-related hazards of too much screen time.

Healthy Eating, Active Living (HEAL) initiatives emphasizing environmental and policy changes are in development in every region, as are targeted HEAL grant programs to support community organizations promoting healthy lifestyle behaviors. In 2004, KP committed more than a half million dollars in grant money and services to nine promising community partnerships developed in response to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services STEPS to a HealthierUS program. KP CMI also sponsored a state health policy report and co-sponsored, with the CDC and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, an obesity policy roundtable.

A KP research network comprising more than 30 KP scientists was established to create and disseminate new knowledge. The KP Garfield Memorial Fund also established a Weight Management Research Initiative; in 2005, \$2.5 million was directed into eight new weight management projects. Each focuses on laying an evidence-based foundation for developing, evaluating, and disseminating proven models of obesity treatment and prevention. Results will inform KP practices — and be shared with community health organizations.

At a national level, KP is collaborating with the Division of Nutritional and Physical Activity of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Health Partners, and Group Health Cooperative to translate the CDC's "Guide to Community Preventive Services" chapters on physical activity and nutrition into action.

**Tracking results:**

Dealing with a health issue of this magnitude requires a commitment of many years. KP is in the process of identifying process and outcomes measures that can be consistently applied throughout the program. In addition, early results indicate an increase in the rate of BMI recording. Preliminary evaluation of KidShape® and KP KIDS weight management programs indicates statistically significant improvements in health behaviors, and early results from Balance®, KP's online weight management program, indicated an associated weight loss.