

AB 290 (Alejo)

Foundations for Healthy Nutrition in Child Care

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ISSUE

California's licensing laws do not require providers to undergo any nutrition training. Yet research indicates child care provider training has the greatest impact on the quality of child care programs. With nearly 25% of preschool-aged children overweight or obese, thousands of California's youngest residents face a lifetime of health challenges (e.g., diabetes, heart disease, cancer) related to poor nutrition. Conversely, children who practice healthy eating habits during the first five years of life are more likely to extend those healthy habits into adulthood. With more than 45,000 licensed child care facilities in California serving over one-million children, child care providers are uniquely positioned to help ensure young children are exposed to good nutrition during the early years.

NEED

Nationally, obesity among preschoolers has tripled in the past 30 years. In California, the nearly 25% of children, age two to five, who are overweight or obese are at risk of developing chronic diseases which contribute to escalating health care costs and negatively impact quality of life. Young children are spending more time in child care than ever before: 80% of preschool-aged children with employed mothers spend an average of 40 hours per week in some form of child care. A growing body of research shows that training for child care providers can improve the quality of early childhood programs. As demonstrated in many other states, prioritizing nutrition training for providers both improves the quality of care and is widely supported by the early care and education workforce. California's licensing laws should also prioritize nutrition training for child care providers as a reasonable and necessary means of supporting healthy nutrition habits and quality child care programs. The Institute of Medicine recently underscored the need for policy-driven, systemic change to effectively reverse obesity trends; the child care environment presents a distinct opportunity to model and promote good nutrition for California's young children.

REQUEST

Amend child care licensing laws (California Health and Safety Code §1596.865 – 1596.866) to increase the required hours of preventive health practices training for providers to include one hour on childhood nutrition.

HISTORY

California – unlike many other states – has not yet adjusted child care provider training requirements to reflect the urgent need for healthy nutrition in child care settings. The Legislature has prioritized healthy nutrition in child care through other strategies. For example, AB 2084, enacted in 2010, improved the nutritional quality of beverages served in all licensed child care. Most recently, in 2012, AB 1872 garnered broad Legislative and community support to set basic nutrition standards for all foods served in licensed family day care homes. While the Senate and the Assembly passed AB 1872, Governor Brown's veto message asserted that he "*can support a measure that helps family child care providers learn about nutrition and serve healthier foods at a lower cost, but this bill [AB 1872] goes beyond that.*"

Requiring one hour of nutrition training helps child care providers learn about healthy meal and snacks, promotes the development of healthy eating habits among young children, and aligns with the First Lady *Let's Move! Child Care Campaign*. Furthermore, it supports complimentary efforts to improve the nutritional quality of school meals and increase access to healthy foods and beverages in neighborhoods.

OUTCOMES

Requiring early childhood educators to take one hour of childhood nutrition as a part of the licensing process ensures that all incoming licensed child care providers learn about the importance of healthy meals and snacks, cost-effective strategies, and age-appropriate meal patterns and serving sizes. Research has shown that provider training positively impacts child care quality. Nutrition training for providers would support an increase in the healthy meals and snacks served in child care settings and the development of healthy eating habits and preferences.