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FIRST LADY FRANCES STRICKLAND LAUNCHES OBESITY-PREVENTION INITIATIVE

Governor Directs ODH's Office of Healthy Ohio to Create a Plan to Fight Obesity in Ohio

COLUMBUS – First Lady Frances Strickland today announced an initiative to help tackle Ohio's childhood-obesity epidemic.

"As I travel the state, I see the great promise our young people exhibit every day through their creativity, their intelligence and their hope for the future. We must do our part to ensure we give them the best start possible by teaching them to make healthy choices and lead healthy lives," Frances Strickland said

At the Healthy Ohio Forum on Childhood Obesity Prevention, Frances Strickland announced a directive from Ohio Governor Ted Strickland for the Ohio Department of Health's Office of Healthy Ohio (OHO) to develop the Ohio Obesity Prevention Plan.

The Ohio Obesity Prevention Plan will be a comprehensive, multi-faceted obesity prevention plan to fight the causes and effects to the governor by March 31, 2009. According to the governor's directive, the plan will:

- Assure ongoing, interagency collaboration regarding obesity prevention strategies and their implementation.
- Review and evaluate existing information and plans on obesity prevention.
- Develop goals and strategies, including policy and system changes to encourage long-term sustainability and address high-risk populations.
- Make recommendations to support and enhance specific actionable measures that can be implemented at the state and local level to prevent and reduce obesity, especially in children and adolescents.
- Create a five-year timeline for measuring specific and realistic goals and objectives regarding the State's progress in achieving the goals of the plan in reducing obesity among Ohioans and creating healthier lifestyle choices.
- Identify individual and organizational responsibility for implementing specific action steps that are included in the plan.

The plan will be created by state agencies and departments and representatives from the public or private sector that focus nutrition, physical activity and education; promote the health and wellness of ethnically diverse or economically disadvantaged Ohioans; conduct research on the causes and effects of obesity; and representatives from local governments, including city planners and those who work in health-related fields.

"We owe it to our children to take action against this epidemic," Jackson said before the walk. "Healthy behaviors instilled in childhood are often carried into adulthood. Sadly, the reverse is also true."

The Healthy Ohio Forum on Childhood Obesity Prevention was held at the Vern Riffe Center for Government and the Arts in Columbus. U.S. Olympic gold medalist and Cincinnati resident Mary Wineberg kicked off the event by leading a fitness walk around the Riffe.

Sponsored by ODH and OHO, forum participants sought ways to ensure today's children have a chance to live long, healthy lives and begin discussion on solutions to curb the epidemic. If current trends continue, the future looks bleak. Consider these facts:

- Type 2 diabetes – once known as adult-onset diabetes – is now often diagnosed in children.
- Nearly 17 percent of Ohio third graders are obese and another 18 percent are overweight.
- Sixty percent of overweight children have at least one cardiovascular risk factor such as high blood pressure or high cholesterol.
- Based on current overweight and obesity trends, one-third of children today will develop diabetes over their lifetime.

“This trend must be reversed,” said OHO Director Cynthia Burnell said. “Many experts agree today's generation of children will live shorter lives than their parents.”

Nearly two-thirds of Ohio's residents are overweight (38 percent) or obese (28 percent), making Ohio at fifth-heaviest in the nation. If the childhood obesity epidemic continues, these numbers can be expected to rise, Burnell added.

Subtitled Setting the Direction for Healthier Children, the forum featured a keynote address from William Dietz, M.D., Ph.D., director of the Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Several other speakers gave presentations including Jerry Jurgensen, CEO, Nationwide, and vice chairman, Ohio Business Roundtable; Steven Allen, M.D., CEO, Nationwide Children's Hospital; Jolene Molitoris, assistant director, Ohio Department of Transportation; and Teresa C. Long, M.D., MPH, health commissioner, Columbus Public Health.

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