A supportive network of nationwide partners (Alliance for a Healthier Generation, United States Department of Agriculture, National Recreation and Park Association, American Heart Association, American Academy of Pediatris, and Physical Activity (HEPA) standards. Through Commit to Health, park and recreation agencies are playing a critical role in obesity prevention efforts by providing access to nutritious foods and opportunities for physical activity in healthy environments aligned with national standards that support such efforts.

Methodology

Committed to Health: Overview

Since the launch of the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA)’s five-year Commit to Health (C2H) initiative, since 2014 in Miami with First Lady Michelle Obama, millions of children in low-income communities nationwide have been provided nutritious summer and afterschool meals during out-of-school time (OST), and hundreds of thousands have been educated about healthy eating and physical activity habits in park and recreation sites that provide healthy environments in accordance with healthy eating and Physical Activity (HEPA) standards. Through Commit to Health, park and recreation agencies are playing a critical role in obesity prevention efforts by providing access to nutritious foods and opportunities for physical activity in healthy environments aligned with standards that support such efforts.

Study included three interventions:
1. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Summer Feeding Program sites and USDA afterschool feeding sites
2. Nutrition literacy program, and
3. Commit to healthy Eating and Physical Activity (HEPA) standards.

A supportive network of nationwide partners (Alliance for a Healthier Generation, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), among others) are critical to the successful implementation of the three interventions.

Nutrition Literacy Programming

Children learned a lot about nutritious foods, the organs of their bodies, and how to use nutrition knowledge in the nutrition literacy program provided by NRPA. Through fun, engaging, cartoon-based programming called The Orgelotry Guys (which includes two characters such as Healthy Kid, Peter Pancreas, and Patriotic the Large Intestine), the importance of good eating habits and the importance of exercise was understood by kids. These lessons were complemented by USDA MyPlate activities, Foods of the Month programming that included focusing on food groups during a certain week during the summer months (experiential food tasting activities in their nutrition), and in-depth activities on how to make nutritious choices were presented.

Healthy Eating and Physical Activity (HEPA) Standards

The HEPA standards were created in 2011 to create up-to-date, evidence-based, practical values that foster the best possible nutrition and physical activity outcomes for children in grades K-12 attending out-of-school time (OST) programs. The HEPA standards have been adopted by many organizations, including NRPA. The standards help identify opportunities to improve nutrition and physical activity outcomes for children attending OST programs by using goals to serve foods and beverages, creating reduced fat dairy products, providing water at all meal sites, and ensuring that all children have access to physical activity opportunities. Regarding physical activity, EHCA encourages parks to provide at least 20 minutes of activity daily for health programs, and 60 minutes for full day programs, and the imitation of digital screen time.

Results

Children

The survey was completed by a lot about nutritious foods, the organs of their bodies, and how to use nutrition knowledge in the nutrition literacy program provided by NRPA. Through fun, engaging, cartoon-based programming called The Orgelotry Guys (which includes two characters such as Healthy Kid, Peter Pancreas, and Patriotic the Large Intestine), the importance of good eating habits and the importance of exercise was understood by kids. These lessons were complemented by USDA MyPlate activities, Foods of the Month programming that included focusing on food groups during a certain week during the summer months (experiential food tasting activities in their nutrition), and in-depth activities on how to make nutritious choices were presented.

Food asked regarding their consumption of foods that were part of the Foods of the Month program which included assessing whether children asked regarding foods served at home and camp.

Parents

Parents were asked about changes in eating habits due to their children having been campers in locations, where nutrition literacy programming was implemented. Specifically, significantly more parents reported having heard about the educational programs called The Orgelotry Guys, and/or the USDA MyPlate program, at the end of the summer than in the beginning. Parents reported an increase in consumption of fruits (from 38.3% to 65.3%; p=0.000) - “Which food below would you have the highest amount of fiber?” to children and eat at home.

Conclusions

This study shows child and adult healthy eating behaviors can be improved via summer camp programming. The impressive gains in nutrition knowledge and associated changes in healthy eating behaviors, and their potential to improve the health of children and their parents throughout our nation, give much support for expansion of similar out-of-school time efforts. NRPA’s commitment to expanding Commit to Health as an afterschool nutrition and physical activity programming is apparent as the important nutrition messages about the health benefits of nutritious foods taken home by children. Parents reported increased consumption of fresh fruits, vegetables, lean protein, and lean dairy in their household, and a decrease in consumption of sugary beverages.

Commit to Health: A Nationwide Summer Camp Nutrition and Feeding Intervention Improves Nutrition Knowledge and Healthy Eating Behaviors of Children, Parents, and Staff

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1