Parks and Recreation Commit to Health through Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Standards

The National Recreation and Park Association, in collaboration with Partnership for a Healthier America and Alliance for a Healthier Generation, launches campaign to help kids grow up healthy with their community parks and recreation.

ASHBURN, VA., February 25, 2014 – Today, at an event in Gwen Cherry Park in Miami, Fla., the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) announced Commit to Health — a campaign to get kids healthy supported by the Partnership for a Healthier America (PHA). Commit to Health will bring healthy eating and physical activity standards to community park and recreation programs throughout the country.

Commit to Health is a five-year campaign that supports the implementation and evaluation of Healthy Eating and Physical Activity (HEPA) standards in park and recreation sites, like public parks and recreation centers, across the U.S. These standards help ensure children in out-of-school time programs receive healthy food and adequate physical activity time to make each child happier and healthier and to combat inactivity trends for our nation’s youth. NRPA plans to have at least 2,000 sites implementing HEPA standards in their out-of-school time programs by the end of the five-year campaign.

In remarks at an event in Gwen Cherry Park, First Lady Michelle Obama applauded the announcement.

“Between today’s announcement and our work to serve better food and get more activity into our schools, we’re now ensuring that more and more of our kids will be staying healthy throughout the entire arc of their day,” said First Lady Michelle Obama. “We’ve revamped our school meal program, so soon, millions more kids will be starting their day with a healthy meal...and they’ll get another good meal at lunch—a meal that includes more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. They are getting active through the day, whether that’s during recess, or PE class, or during an exercise break between lessons. And when the school day ends, they’ll head to an after-school program like this one, and they’ll get even more nutritious food and even more opportunities to get active.”

“Local park and recreation departments have always been health and wellness leaders in their communities and are now a critical part of the health system” said Barbara Tulipane, NRPA President and CEO. “The National Recreation and Park Association is dedicated to improving the health and welfare of all Americans through community parks and recreation. Commit to Health is just one more way parks and recreation can help make a significant and measurable impact in the health of their communities and help children grow up healthy, regardless of their social opportunity.”

The HEPA standards, created in 2011, have been adopted by numerous organizations for out-of-school time programs to foster the best possible nutrition and physical activity outcomes for children attending them. To help park and recreation sites as they implement the HEPA standards, NRPA is working with the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, which will provide technical assistance and planning support to participating sites.
"Creating healthier environments that surround children — in their homes, schools, and communities — is critical to reducing the staggering prevalence of childhood obesity across our country," said Dr. Howell Wechsler, CEO of the Alliance for a Healthier Generation. "Out-of-school time providers play an important role in shaping the health of the next generation. We are proud to be working with the National Recreation and Park Association and look forward to providing their staff the process, tools and resources needed to increase access to healthier foods and physical activity and empower the young people they serve to develop lifelong, healthy habits."

NRPA is thrilled to be partnering with organizations like the Alliance for a Healthier Generation and PHA as these collaborations help bring healthier and better resources to children who need it most. The Alliance for a Healthier Generation’s goal is to reduce the prevalence of childhood obesity through collaborations with different organizations. Founded in 2010 in conjunction with – but independent from – Let’s Move!, PHA is a nonpartisan, nonprofit that is led by some of the nation’s most respected health and childhood obesity advocates. Supporting the effort is honorary chair First Lady Michelle Obama, alongside honorary vice-chairmen The Honorable William H. Frist, MD, and The Honorable Mayor Cory A. Booker of Newark, NJ. The board of directors also includes nationally recognized business leaders, advocates, health professionals and thought leaders from a variety of backgrounds.

“What we know is that active kids do better—in school and in life,” said PHA CEO Lawrence A. Soler. “NRPA’s commitment is a big step forward in getting our kids into healthier environments throughout their day. I am so pleased to welcome NRPA – an organization that is absolutely critical to the communities, families and kids it serves – into the PHA family.”

NRPA’s objectives through Commit to Health are to support the implementation of the HEPA standards among community park and recreation agencies, promote the program to raise awareness of HEPA standards, and provide technical assistance and evaluation of the HEPA standards to ensure long-term behavior change.

The National Recreation and Park Association is a national not-for-profit organization dedicated to advancing park, recreation and conservation efforts that enhance quality of life for all people. Through its network of 40,000 recreation and park professionals and citizens, NRPA encourages the promotion of healthy and active lifestyles, conservation initiatives and equitable access to parks and public space. For more information, visit www.NRPA.org. For digital access to NRPA’s flagship publication, Parks & Recreation, visit www.parksandrecreation.org.

###