

Report from the Oklahoma State Department of Health Turning Point Office

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While each of us are all keenly aware of the need to improve Oklahoma's overall health status, the awareness of "how" is far more elusive. In times when resources are few and barriers seem insurmountable, we should turn our focus, at least for a moment to the "why." When analyzing why we must improve, clarity becomes evident. In Oklahoma, adults are dying at a higher rate due to heart disease than most other states. Our state has a total mortality rate higher than the rest of the nation. But even more disturbing is Oklahoma's infant mortality which is higher than the U.S. rate, with rates among Black infants TWICE as high as White infants. Sixty-five (65) percent of adults in the Sooner State are either overweight or obese, and 31 percent of youth are either overweight or at risk of being overweight. One of the most viable reasons "why" we need to act is because if we don't, our current generation of children could be the first in the history of our country to have a shorter life expectancy than that of their parents.

With all these negative motivators for "why" we should act, I am pleased to highlight and say we have the most important reason we **can** act. Because in Oklahoma, we have **YOU!** We have community partners working at the local level to pass policies so children have tobacco free parks and tobacco free schools to learn and play in. We have transportation partners at the state and local level recognizing that motor vehicles are not the only mode of transportation and it's a positive thing to designate a place for bicycles and pedestrians. School districts across Oklahoma are taking steps to improve the food selections in cafeterias so our children are served healthy meals. We are working to establish Federally Qualified Health Centers in areas of the state where access to comprehensive health care is not only cumbersome, it is virtually impossible for the uninsured and under-insured. In Oklahoma we have realized the value of the built environment and how it not only impacts health, but also contributes to economic growth. And finally, in Oklahoma we have state and local partners working together with unity of effort around a single Oklahoma Health Improvement Plan (OHIP). Tailored at the local level, these efforts are focused toward three flagship issues, tobacco, obesity and child health. In essence, in Oklahoma we have Turning Point Partnerships – keenly aware of the **need**, educating others on the **why** and fully committed to the **how**.

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