

**OBESITY PREVENTION FUNDING FOR  
COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS IN THE  
COMMONWEALTH**



**Required by Item 468 1c Conference Report (Regular Session 2010)**

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## **PREFACE**

This report contains information concerning the Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth's distribution of funds designated to reduce and prevent childhood obesity as required by HB 30, Conference Report Amendment Item 468 1c (Regular Session 2010). The Virginia Foundation of Healthy Youth is required to report the status of funding for obesity prevention activities pursuant to §32.1-355 of the Code of Virginia.

## **BACKGROUND**

Established in 1999 by the Virginia General Assembly, the Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth (VFHY) empowers Virginia's youth to make healthy choices by reducing and preventing youth tobacco use, substance use, and childhood obesity. VFHY receives no taxpayer funds; it is funded through Virginia's share of the Master Settlement Agreement (MSA), a legal settlement between the state attorneys general of 46 states and the nation's major tobacco manufacturers over tobacco-related health-care costs.

Since VFHY began its work, youth tobacco use in Virginia has seen great declines. Smoking among high school students has been cut by more than 80 percent, from 28.6 percent in 2001 to 5.5 percent in 2019. Smoking among middle school students has also dropped more than 80 percent, from 10.6 percent in 2001 to 1.9 percent in 2019. VFHY continues to work on tobacco use prevention with increased focus on e-cigarette (vaping) use. E-cigarette use among Virginia high school students has increased 78 percent between 2017-2018 and is being treated as a national youth public health crisis.

Due to VFHY's success at reducing youth tobacco use in the Commonwealth and delivering prevention messaging to young people, the General Assembly expanded the Foundation's mission and scope of work in 2009 to include reducing and preventing childhood obesity. With the expanded mission, the General Assembly also changed the foundation's name to the Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth.

Tobacco use and obesity are the two leading causes of preventable deaths in the United States. One out of three children in the United States is obese or overweight. Virginia currently ranks 35<sup>th</sup> in the nation for childhood obesity in 10- to 17-year-olds, and 24<sup>th</sup> in the nation for high school obesity. In Virginia, 30.6 percent of high school students are obese or overweight. Obesity prevalence among high school students in Virginia is 14.8 percent, about the same as the national rate of 15.5 percent. Among adults, Virginia ranks 25<sup>th</sup> in the nation for obesity, with about one out of three adults (31.9 percent) considered obese.

Childhood obesity can lead to serious, lifelong, and life-threatening health problems such as Type 2 diabetes and heart disease, problems that were once only seen in adult populations. Experts fear that due to the obesity epidemic, this may be the first generation of children to have shorter life expectancies than their parents.

Since beginning work on its expanded mission in 2010, VFHY has instituted a series of community-based grants to help form and strengthen community partnerships to prevent and reduce childhood obesity on the local level. VFHY has hosted "Weight of the State" conferences that focus on childhood obesity prevention; however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic the 2021 conference did not occur. In place of the conference, VFHY conducted a four-part virtual event series that explored how social determinants of health, such as healthy food access, contribute to obesity prevalence and how they can be considered to prevent childhood obesity. These events were hosted under the "Empower Series" –a collection of virtual events aimed to help youth, advocates, and decision-makers empower themselves and others to make healthy

choices. VFHY's youth-led volunteer group Y Street, is also working to enhance awareness of the benefits of drinking water and increasing access to water in schools.

## **SUMMARY**

During the 2009 General Assembly session, the General Assembly expanded the Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth's (VFHY) mission to include childhood obesity reduction and prevention. In 2010, the General Assembly directed the VFHY Board of Trustees to devote at least \$1 million per year from its budget toward childhood obesity prevention efforts.

### **Healthy Communities Action Teams (HCAT) Grants**

A majority of the VFHY funding for childhood obesity prevention is dedicated to the HCAT initiative, which establishes and supports community partnerships to fight childhood obesity on the local level by addressing policy, systems, and environmental change strategies. Funding and training provided by VFHY through the HCAT grants allow these community partnerships to implement promising and evidence-based practices in childhood obesity prevention recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

In 2020, VFHY awarded its sixth round of HCAT childhood obesity prevention grants, increasing the grant period from two to three years in order to provide more sustained funding to grantees. HCAT grantees are selected by an independent grant application review panel and required to comply with VFHY reporting procedures and evaluation. VFHY approved \$2.3 million in funding to 26 HCATs over three years. Due to the impacts of COVID-19, one HCAT canceled its contract midway through the first year, leaving 25 HCATs. A list of those 25 HCATs can be found later in this report.

VFHY's HCAT grantees implement a variety of strategies for childhood obesity prevention, such as working with or establishing farmer's markets to increase community access to fresh produce; increasing physical activity among children enrolled in after-school programs; creating and maintaining community gardens; increasing breastfeeding; and increasing awareness of good nutrition habits.

In the past year:

- 32% of HCATs established or supported a farm to school initiative
- 32% of HCATs supported a youth walk or run
- 36% of HCATs supported youth water access initiatives
- 40% of HCATs participated in a food distribution
- 40% of HCATs provided healthy cooking classes for youth
- 52% of HCATs established or supported a school/community garden
- 64% of HCATs provided vegetable growing/gardening education to youth or families
- 72% of HCATs communicated healthy physical activity messaging to the community

- 80% of HCATs provided nutrition education to youth or families
- 84% of HCATs communicated healthy food/nutrition messaging to the community

These communities are being served by VFHY's 2020-2023 HCATs: Arlington County, Augusta County, Buena Vista, Charlottesville, Chesterfield County, Culpeper County, Emporia, Fairfax, Fairfax County, Falls Church, Floyd County, Giles County, Greensville County, Hampton, Henrico County, James City County, Lexington, Loudoun County, Manassas, Newport News, Norfolk, Orange County, Page County, Petersburg, Portsmouth, Radford, Richmond, Roanoke, Rockbridge County, Salem, Scott County, Staunton, Surry County, Sussex County, Tazewell County, Warren County, and Waynesboro.

### **Collaboration with Partners**

Established by a Virginia General Assembly resolution, Virginia Healthy Youth Day promotes healthy lifestyles for Virginia's children. Typically, VFHY encourages grantees and partners to hold Virginia Healthy Youth Day events every January to promote increased physical activity, better nutrition, and substance, tobacco, and e-cigarette free living.

VFHY determined that in-person Healthy Youth Day events would not be appropriate in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In lieu of a single day of in-person celebration, throughout 2021 VFHY has facilitated impactful virtual meetings with General Assembly members and members from VFHY's youth engagement program, Y Street, to discuss how youth are implementing change to improve their own community's health and well-being.

Another VFHY initiative is Rev Your Bev, which raises awareness about the health benefits of drinking water. Rev Your Bev brings community groups, educators, and health advocates together to change the way Virginians think about beverages. The Rev Your Bev initiative culminates in Rev Your Bev Day each year when partners celebrate with interactive displays and educational opportunities. Since 2013, more than 255,000 Virginians have participated in more than 2,500 Rev Your Bev events held across the state in schools and community centers. Since 2018, Rev Your Bev Day efforts have been focused on early childhood education centers and preschool providers to increase awareness of healthy beverage choices. In addition to generating awareness, Virginia early childhood education providers were encouraged to establish center-based healthy hydration policies that would sustain the programmatic goals of the Rev Your Bev initiative. As part of VFHY's partnership with the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation in a statewide Nemours grant, Rev Your Bev Day engaged more than 500 early childhood education centers in November 2020.

VFHY supports the Nutrition and Food Security Workgroup of the Governor's Children's Cabinet, chaired by the First Lady of Virginia Pamela Northam. VFHY and the workgroup (which include, but are not limited to the Virginia Department of Education, Virginia Department of Health, American Heart Association, School Nutrition Association, the Virginia Department of

Agriculture, community coalitions, and local nonprofit agencies) address three areas of focus for improving health outcomes for Virginia's children:

1. Expand access to nutritious food and decrease food insecurity among pregnant women
2. Increase access to nutritious foods and decrease food insecurity among children (a focus where VFHY contributes expertise, resources, and communicates best practices among networks); and
3. Promote community-based food systems to increase access to healthy, local foods

Due to COVID-19 the Nutrition and Food Security Workgroup has not met since 2020, but the continued participation and collaboration of VFHY, state agencies and partners in the workgroup has remained constant through a variety of initiatives.

For example, the Virginia Roadmap to End Hunger launched in September 2020 with the support of VFHY staff expertise, communications capacity, and through the use of the FeedVA website. The Roadmap to End Hunger is a set of goals and strategies for achieving universal food security across the Commonwealth. Its launch and dissemination was spearheaded through cross-agency collaboration between the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Virginia Department of Education, Virginia Department of Social Services, Virginia Department of Health and all partners of the Nutrition and Food Security Workgroup including VFHY.

Additionally, VFHY's continued maintenance and promotion of FeedVA was supported by staff throughout FY21. Established in 2017, this effort supports and connects organizations statewide that are addressing food insecurity. Through the FeedVA website, community groups have access to data mapping, resources, community-based coalitions, and can learn about funding opportunities that can be used to maximize impact.

In the 2020-21 school year VFHY also supported efforts to increase Farm to School participation across the state. Through the Farm to School Leadership Team, VFHY worked with groups such as Virginia Department of Education's Office of School Nutrition, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Local Environmental Agriculture Project, No Kid Hungry, local school district officials and others to develop a statewide strategic plan to enhance participation and thus consumption of locally grown fruits and vegetables by Virginia's students. Increased consumption of healthy foods is a key obesity prevention strategy that VFHY continues to support.

Throughout the pandemic, VFHY staff have served on the Farm to School Leadership Team, the Virginia Farm to School Conference Planning committee, and assisted the state Department of Education with their 2021 launch of the Governor's Scorecard on Nutrition & Physical Activity.

## **FY21 CHILDHOOD OBESITY FUNDING OVERVIEW**

<b>HCAT grants</b>	\$741,000
<b>Marketing initiatives</b>	\$160,000
<b>Empower Series and trainings</b>	\$9,890
<b>Administrative</b>	\$176,076
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,086,966</b>

## HEALTHY COMMUNITIES ACTION TEAMS (HCAT) GRANT RECIPIENTS

### 2020-2023

Organization and Project	Funding Year 1,2,3	Description
<b>Alternatives, Inc.</b>  <b>HCAT-4-Mindful Eating and Exercise (HCAT-4-MEE)</b>	\$30000 \$30000 \$30000	Since 2006, Alternatives has developed a coalition of local government, behavioral health, and early childhood providers, secured resources for evidenced-based prevention programs, and provided training and advocacy. In FY17 HCAT-4-MEE was formed to improve the health and physical activity for children 2-10 by institutionalizing changes in policies and practices. Activities include implementing policies and practices to promote oral health, healthy foods, and physical activity in participating preschool, child care, and after-school programs.
<b>Arlington Partnership for Children, Youth and Families Foundation</b>  <b>Arlington Healthy Communities Action Team (HCAT)</b>	\$30000 \$30000 \$30000	The Arlington HCAT will implement and evaluate the Fresh Food Explorers program with Virginia Preschool Initiative classrooms in Arlington Public Schools. The HCAT will work with strategic partners in Arlington, such as the School Health Advisory Board, to advance policy level changes in the school system to reduce childhood obesity and promote active living.
<b>City of Manassas</b>  <b>Manassas Healthy Community Action Team (MHCAT)</b>	\$30000 \$30000 \$30000	The MHCAT will focus on several key issues in the City of Manassas. MHCAT will work with the City to identify improvements that need to be made to allow easier access to healthy food choices and recreational and healthy living activities as well as determining areas in the City that are underserved and/or facilities that are in need of improvement. This focus includes improving parks, park accessibility, and increasing multimodal transportation options.
<b>Cultivate Charlottesville</b>  <b>Charlottesville Food Justice Network HCAT</b>	\$30000 \$30000 \$30000	The Charlottesville Food Justice Network HCAT is a collaborative community approach aimed at increasing health outcomes and obesity prevention efforts for Charlottesville youth. The HCAT improves healthy school meals, engages youth in school gardens, and cultivates leadership and life-long healthy living skills. The HCAT aims to transform school meal options with a 40% increase in healthy, fresh foods offered while implementing educational programs in the schoolyard.

		Each program activity amplifies youth leadership, decision-making, and vision.
<b>Culpeper Wellness Foundation</b>  Culpeper HCAT	\$30000 \$30000 \$30000	The Culpeper HCAT continues to increase access to gym facilities for youth served by Culpeper County Public Schools, OPTIONS and Kids Central. Programming will be provided by Culpeper Sport and Fitness, Powell Wellness Center, and/or Parks and Recreation. The HCAT also hosts nutrition education provided by Virginia Tech Cooperative Extension and will work with schools to implement a Safe Routes to School program to increase the number of children safely walking and biking to school.
<b>Eastern Virginia Medical School</b>  Hampton Roads Breastfeeding Education and Advocacy Team (HR-BEAT)	\$30000 \$30000 \$30000	The Consortium for Infant and Child Health (CINCH) HR-BEAT will engage the Hampton Roads community by developing and expanding partnerships with breastfeeding partners and increasing access to breastfeeding training. A social marketing campaign will actively engage the community, provide education, and change social norms and policy. HR-BEAT is committed to bringing the community together to develop community-driven solutions to support breastfeeding across subsets of the Hampton Roads community.
<b>Fairfax County Health Department</b>  Fairfax Food Council	\$30000 \$30000 \$30000	The Fairfax Food Council will leverage student advocacy to inform healthy food messaging and nutritional literacy. The Council will expand the Fairfax County Public Schools Garden to Cafeteria program beyond elementary schools to include middle and high schools, serving high-risk, underserved students. School gardens located at secondary schools can provide access to healthy foods among some of the most vulnerable or food insecure students in Fairfax County.
<b>Greater Richmond Fit4Kids</b>  Greater Richmond Coalition for Healthy Children	\$30000 \$30000 \$30000	The Greater Richmond Coalition for Healthy Children has successfully implemented programs and policies in the Richmond region to ensure healthy eating and physical activity in schools. The Coalition has seen major success in areas related to school-based physical activity, active transportation, and nutrition. The focus of their work has expanded to other school divisions in the region with the goal of ensuring 30 minutes of daily recess and improving the nutritional quality of school breakfast.
<b>Greenville/Emporia Community Health Action Team</b>	\$29904 \$29424	The Greenville/Emporia Community Health Action Team (CHAT) helps prevent and reduce childhood obesity by implementing CHAT HELP which includes: providing capacity-building activities by identifying and providing training;

CHAT HELP (Healthier Emporia/Greenville for Life Project)	\$30000	engaging in community-wide media campaigns promoting physical activity and healthy eating; enhancing the Meherrin River Trail making it more accessible for residents; building and maintaining a park that is safe, attractive and located close to residential areas; and encouraging residents to make healthier food choices.
<b>Healthy Floyd</b>  Healthy Floyd	\$30000 \$30000 \$30000	Healthy Floyd is working hard to ensure that initiatives to prevent childhood obesity in Floyd grow and thrive with widespread community support. Projects include: increasing preschool and elementary-aged student vegetable consumption, expanding 95210 education, increasing physical activity opportunities for preschool and primary students by promoting youth leagues and after-school activities, and decreasing sedentary behavior by promoting recreational use of public and private spaces by organizing various community-wide, multi-generational walk/run initiatives.
<b>LENOWISCO Health District</b>  Healthy Kids-Live Healthy In Scott County Coalition	\$28946 \$30000 \$30000	The Healthy Kids-Live Healthy in Scott County Coalition will continue to implement the 5210 Let's Go! Program in three Scott County public elementary/primary schools K-6 grades. The coalition will assist school wellness teams in the implementation of policies that support 5210 Let's Go! program's strategies for healthy eating, more physical activity, less screen time, and less intake of sugary drinks.
<b>Loudoun County Health Department</b>  Loudoun Pediatric Obesity Coalition	\$25000 \$30000 \$30000	The Loudoun Pediatric Obesity Coalition (LPOC) works to make active play free and equitably accessible in the county while continuing to strengthen nutrition education programming and garden-based learning. LPOC also promotes breastfeeding policies through an awards program. In response to demand for free community garden space, LPOC plans to research community garden zoning and potential sites for community gardens near low-income residents. LPOC will train a network of Play Rangers and host free active eco-play pop-up events.
<b>New River Valley Community Services</b>  Giles Community Garden Healthy Community Action Team (GCG-HCAT)	\$28000 \$30000 \$30000	A new GCG-HCAT will be formed with a vision statement and strategic plan. Training opportunities will be pursued to assist with organizational capacity. The GCG-HCAT will make infrastructure improvements to the existing community garden and provide educational programs and weekly meals for at-risk youth and families during the growing season. The team will provide targeted outreach and education to identified low-income neighborhoods with the goal of establishing community gardens in those areas.

<b>Nurture</b>  #RVAbreastfeeds	\$30000 \$30000 \$30000	#RVAbreastfeeds will seek the Breastfeeding Family Friendly Community (BFFC) designation as outlined in the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action. Additional strategies include: 1) Breastfeeding Real Talk Facebook Live series. 2) Social media messaging. 3) Breastfeeding Welcome Here campaign. 4) Outreach to local elected officials and public health leaders. 5) Recruit champions to assume leadership for components of the BFFC initiative. 6) Develop a 3-year strategic plan for the BFFC initiative. 7) Develop lactation guidelines for public schools.
<b>Orange County Office on Youth</b>  Orange Healthy Community Action Team (Orange HCAT)	\$30000 \$30000 \$30000	The Orange HCAT will implement local activities and systematic changes at all Orange County School-Aged Childcare program sites as well as the Love Outreach Food Pantry, a subset of the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank. The ultimate goal of the Orange HCAT is to provide more fresh produce options and interactive educational opportunities about healthy eating choices, as well as more outdoor/physical activity opportunities to Orange County youth.
<b>Page Alliance for Community Action</b>  Page Alliance for Community Action HCAT	\$30000 \$30000 \$30000	Page Alliance for Community Action HCAT works to improve access to safe parks and recreational activities and promote healthy choices for youth during the school day. Their work includes improving the built environment by installing a splash pad at Hawksbill Park and improving the playground equipment at local parks. The HCAT will also work with the school division to install water bottle filling stations to increase the daily intake of water for students.
<b>Petersburg Public Library</b>  Petersburg Healthy Community Action Team (HCAT)	\$30000 \$30000 \$30000	The Petersburg HCAT is working to target over 2,400 youth in the City of Petersburg to implement Farm to School programming centered around the Virginia Department of Education's Harvest of the Month program. The HCAT has established a network of support for urban farmers/community gardeners within Petersburg and is working to increase SNAP participation through marketing and outreach strategies and support collaborative initiatives that expand access to healthy food in high priority areas via a mobile market.
<b>Project GROWS</b>  Project GROWS HCAT	\$30000 \$30000 \$30000	The Project GROWS HCAT will partner with Augusta Health, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Staunton City Public Schools, Staunton Recreation & Parks, and the Staunton Augusta YMCA to provide gardening, nutrition, and cooking education. In Staunton, HCAT partners will collaborate on a comprehensive summer feeding, nutrition, and gardening education program.

		In Waynesboro, HCAT partners will promote increased consumption of fruits and vegetables through nutrition education and food access programming.
<b>Radford City Schools</b>  Radford HCAT	\$29564 \$30000 \$30000	The Radford HCAT will increase wellness and sustain an improved health culture in the Radford community by addressing hunger mitigation and food security efforts, and the physical environment that fosters fitness and improved nutrition education.
<b>Rockbridge Area Community Services</b>  Live Healthy Rockbridge Kids (LHRK) HCAT	\$30000 \$30000 \$30000	The LHRK HCAT partnership is working collaboratively to implement innovative strategies focused on policy, systems, and environmental change around nutrition, access to healthy foods, and physical activity. The HCAT is working to expand healthy retail efforts, enhance community/volunteer trainings, expand after-school programming emphasizing healthy eating and physical activity, expand the Walking Prescription pilot program, and promote and enhance access to local trails.
<b>Salem Area Ecumenical Ministries</b>  SAEM Student-Led Food Pantries Sustainability and Community Engagement	\$30000 \$30000 \$30000	The SAEM HCAT increases access to healthy foods through student-led food pantries that will be a “student-choice” design where students can shop from a variety of fresh fruits, vegetables, and healthy staples. The food pantries, established at Andrew Lewis Middle and Salem High are supported by school-based food drives and community food collection efforts. The project will also focus on creating policy change that refocuses anti-hunger efforts to allow students to tackle obesity and food insecurity.
<b>Smart Beginnings Southeast</b>  Sussex and Surry Food Insecurity Collaborative	\$29662 \$29460 \$30000	The Sussex Surry Early Childhood Food Insecurity Collaborative will engage young children and their families impacted by food insecurity. It will connect families to its VA Quality participating early childcare programs and to other related community partners. It will utilize GO NAPSACC, an evidence-based program, to address healthy eating habits in childcare programs.
<b>University of Virginia Cancer Center</b>  Fostering Healthy Beverage Choices to	\$29998 \$30000 \$30000	This project will focus on developing an HCAT within Tazewell County Public Schools and building its capacity. This team will provide direct nutrition education to students in Tazewell County to reduce sugar-sweetened beverages and increase water intake through the implementation of Kids SIPsmartER in 7th grade Health/PE classes. The HCAT will also identify

Reduce Obesity Risk: Tazewell County Public Schools HCAT		additional activities to improve beverage behaviors among students in other grades within Tazewell County.
<b>Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University</b>  Healthy Start	\$30000 \$30000 \$30000	Healthy Start provides experiences, education, and access to healthy lifestyle choices for young children and their families. This community collaboration project will serve low income and underserved families in Roanoke through education and outreach about healthy local foods alongside programs to make these foods affordable and accessible in their neighborhoods. The team's efforts will also include an expanded focus on changing the local food system to be more supportive of healthy, local choices thus making it sustainable.

## **CONCLUSION**

Per the General Assembly's direction, the Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth's Board of Trustees designated \$1 million in dedicated monies to fund and assist obesity prevention activities in FY21.

VFHY allocated most of these funds to 26 community groups across Virginia through VFHY's Healthy Communities Action Teams (HCAT) grant initiative, which utilizes promising and evidence-based practices for childhood obesity prevention recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. VFHY will continue investing in local communities to prevent and reduce obesity through HCAT funding.

VFHY will continue to educate, engage, and promote healthy living for Virginia's youth through partnerships, evidence-based strategies, and best practices for improving nutrition, increasing physical activity, and reducing obesity.

VFHY actively participates and supports a cross-sector of childhood obesity prevention initiatives in Virginia such as the Nutrition and Food Security Workgroup of the Governor's Children's Cabinet, Virginia Farm to School, Virginia Food for Virginia Kids, the Governor's Scorecard on Nutrition & Physical Activity, and ongoing efforts in the Early Childhood Education community to enhance meal and snack options for children and promote water consumption for children. In addition to these strategies, VFHY continues to emphasize health equity by promoting the importance of good nutrition and food security among youth by providing free trainings on promising and evidence-based tactics through VFHY's Empower Series brand of content.

In FY22 VFHY will continue its work assisting with the Virginia Youth Survey to collect data on health factors including child overweight and obesity, nutrition and physical activity, expanding partnerships with statewide partners, encouraging the use of evidence-based practices to increase access to healthy foods, and promoting opportunities for physical activity.

VFHY remains a good steward of the funds entrusted to it to reduce and prevent childhood obesity, and youth tobacco and substance use.