May, 2013 Topics

New IOM Reports on SNAP Allotments, Physical Fitness, and Obesity Prevention

Resources added to FLP resource database

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By Susan Nitzke

On April 22, 2013 a mini-symposium was held in Boston as part of the American Society for Nutrition’s annual conference. Speakers at this mini-symposium summarized three new nutrition and health reports that have been published following workshops sponsored by the Institute of Medicine (IOM).

**Defining SNAP Adequacy.** The report on defining the adequacy of SNAP benefits was prepared in response to a request from USDA to consider whether it is feasible to objectively define the adequacy of SNAP allotments and what steps would need to be taken to support an evidence-based assessment of SNAP adequacy. The IOM committee included a number of economists and public health experts who conducted a review of published reports and government documents. The committee identified the following individual, household, and environmental factors and program characteristics that USDA should consider in defining the adequacy of SNAP allotments:

- Resources such as household income, time to secure and prepare food, and other program benefits
- Individual/household factors such as dietary knowledge, attitudes, culture, skills, equipment, and special needs
- Environmental factors such as food prices, location (access to supermarkets, housing costs, medical expenses, etc.) and transportation
- SNAP program characteristics including education that influence whether participants are able to meet program goals

The committee pointed out ways that USDA could examine participants’ ability to improve their food security by using SNAP benefits. They pointed out limitations in the way benefits are calculated (e.g., weaknesses in the current Benefit Reduction Rate and flawed assumptions of the Thrifty Food Plan). Education to improve food purchasing and preparation skills was mentioned as having “some effectiveness” in extending the purchasing power of SNAP allotments (page 178). A number of important topics were recommended for further research. The full report and a summary document are available online: [http://iom.edu/Reports/2013/Supplemental-Nutrition-Assistance-Program-Examining-the-Evidence-to-Define-Benefit-Adequacy.aspx](http://iom.edu/Reports/2013/Supplemental-Nutrition-Assistance-Program-Examining-the-Evidence-to-Define-Benefit-Adequacy.aspx).

**Fitness Measures and Health Outcomes in Youth.** At the request of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, IOM appointed a committee to assess the relationship between youth fitness test items and health outcomes, recommend the best fitness test items, provide guidance for interpreting fitness scores, and provide an agenda for needed research. The committee recommended measures of body composition (BMI, skinfold thickness and waist circumference), cardiorespiratory endurance (progressive shuttle run or cycle/treadmill tests), and musculoskeletal fitness (handgrip strength and standing long jump) for national youth fitness surveys. A slightly shorter list of valid, reliable and feasible tests was recommended for schools (BMI, progressive shuttle run, handgrip strength and standing long jump tests) along with a list of supplemental education tools such as timed runs. The committee concluded that “collecting fitness data nationally and in schools helps with setting and achieving fitness goals and
priorities for public health at an individual and national level.” The report is available online at http://www.iom.edu/reports/2012/fitness-measures-and-health-outcomes-in-youth.aspx.

Accelerating Progress in Obesity Prevention. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation asked IOM to identify catalysts to speed progress in obesity prevention. The IOM committee evaluated prior strategies and used a systems approach to set a series of goals to strengthen efforts to prevent obesity:

- Make physical activity an integral and routine part of life
- Create food and beverage environments that ensure that healthy food and beverage options are the routine, easy choice
- Transform messages about physical activity and nutrition. An alternative wording for this goal is “marketing what matters for a healthy life.” [NOTE: One of the strategies mentioned under this heading was that USDA should update the policies for SNAP-Ed and other federal programs to encourage educators to give advice about the types of foods to reduce in the diet, consistent with the DGAs.]
- Expand the roles of health care providers, insurers and employers
- Make schools a national focal point

For more information on this report, see http://iom.edu/Reports/2012/Accelerating-Progress-in-Obesity-Prevention.aspx.

Implications for Extension Educators. Because IOM is not a government agency or an industry-sponsored entity and the expert committee members do not have direct financial interests in these areas, IOM reports are considered objective, unbiased, and evidence-based. As such, the recommendations in these reports are likely to be taken into consideration as government agencies and other organizations work to make improvements in these areas. Recommendations from these reports may also provide helpful information for Extension leaders and educators as they plan, conduct, and evaluate health-related programs.
Resources added to the FLP resource database:
2012 Healthy and Homemade displays, recipes and lesson plan developed by Becky Gutzman
https://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/apps/flrc/tch_res2/resourceDetails.cfm?rid=10362
https://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/apps/flrc/tch_res2/resourceDetails.cfm?rid=10356
https://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/apps/flrc/tch_res2/resourceDetails.cfm?rid=10371
https://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/apps/flrc/tch_res2/resourceDetails.cfm?rid=10349