

Sebelius stumps for anti-childhood obesity plan

June 12 2010, By MURRAY EVANS , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- The Obama administration is calling on mayors to help in the fight against childhood obesity because the effort won't work if communities don't engage in it, Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius told a conference Friday.

Sebelius touted first lady Michelle Obama's "Let's Move" campaign against childhood obesity at the annual U.S. Conference of Mayors. Sebelius encouraged about 400 mayors and members of their staffs to have their cities join a new part of the campaign, dubbed "Let's Move Cities and Towns."

"I know well how critical it is that you are mobilized and energized, because you are the leadership teams that can actually make things happen," she said. "We now have, I think, a real opportunity with the spotlight of the first lady on this problem."

Obama addressed the conference by video, saying mayors "know how to develop effective solutions" and can "spur action at the grassroots unlike anyone else."

Sebelius said local leaders can help by building parks, supporting farmers markets and bringing healthier foods into schools.

Obama's program, launched in February 2009, is aimed at solving the [childhood obesity](#) problem in a generation, so children born today can reach adulthood at a healthy weight. It has four components: helping

parents make better [food choices](#), serving healthier food in school vending machines and lunch lines, making healthy food more available and affordable, and encouraging children to exercise more.

Sebelius said one in three American children are overweight or obese. She said that number had quadrupled during the past 20 years.

At the conference, Sebelius was joined by Olympic gymnast Dominique Dawes, who said keeping children active and on a [healthy diet](#) is critical to fighting obesity.

"This is near and dear to my heart," said Dawes, a member of the "Magnificent Seven" in 1996, the first U.S. women's team to win an Olympic gold medal in gymnastics. "[Physical fitness](#) and proper nutrition have really been a part of the core of my childhood."

Sebelius praised citywide weight-loss efforts led by Oklahoma City Mayor Mick Cornett. As of Friday afternoon, the mayor's campaign, thiscityisgoingonadiet.com, included 42,113 participants who had lost a cumulative 576,437 pounds, an average of about 13.7 pounds per person.

"Where Oklahoma City has succeeded is on the awareness side," said Cornett, who signed the pledge for his city to join the "Let's Move Cities and Towns" effort. "What we've seen here is a community that's finally talking about [obesity](#). It was like the taboo subject in our town. No one wanted to talk about it. We just pretended that if we ignored it, it might go away on its own. But we knew it was an issue."

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