

ACTION CONNECTION

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Childhood Obesity Rates Skyrocket, Along with Soda Consumption

By Reyna Villalobos, MPH, CCROPP Director for Fresno County

On Wednesday, April 20, California Center for Public Health Advocacy (CCPHA) released a new report entitled, "California's Soda Tax, Helping Cash-Strapped



Lack of access to healthy foods forces unhealthy choices

Communities Protect Children's Health," which furthers the evidence that soda is a main contributor to the high caloric consumption and obesity problem facing this country, state and county. The report also builds upon the momentum to pass a soda tax in California to create a funding stream to support obesity prevention efforts.

The obesity epidemic continues to be on the rise and monies to support essential obesity prevention programs are scarce. Many programs that support children's health and human services

See **Childhood Obesity** page 5

Safe Environments for our Children: Green Pest Control in Schools

By Sarah Sharpe, Environmental Health Program Director

Even in very small amounts, pesticides have a profound and serious impact on the health and development of children. Young children are especially vulnerable during critical windows of development, when the impacts of pesticide exposure are amplified. Because children have relatively greater skin surface and breathing rates, they are more exposed to pesticides than adults. Their active behavior also puts them in greater contact with contaminated surfaces.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency states, "There are 'critical periods' in human development when exposure to a toxin can permanently alter the way an individual's biological system operates."

Thus, children are more susceptible to pesticides than adults since their bodies are growing and developing.

Still, toxic pesticides are regularly used in schools – of the 40 pesticides most commonly used in schools, 28 cause cancer; 14 are linked to glandular disruption;



PHOTO BY ERICA HASENBECK

Nosworthy kids play in pesticide-free playground

See **Safe Environments for Our Children** page 7

We would like to hear from you!
Send comments to
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NOTES FROM RICHARD P. YANES, JD,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



2014 and the Affordable Care Act – An Improvement for Some, Many Still Left Behind

Anyone with an interest in healthcare knows that 2014 is the year the Affordable Care Act's (ACA) major provisions become effective. Thanks to early action by the California legislature, we've seen some effects take place already – insurance companies can no longer deny children coverage for pre-existing conditions, children can remain on their parent's plan up to the age of 26, assistance with prescription drug costs and more. But for the indigent and those at the lower end of the economic scale who cannot afford coverage, the ACA is a mixed blessing.

Providing health care service to indigent adults is a county requirement mandated by state law. In 1996, the County Board of Supervisors contracted with what became Community Regional Medical Center (CRMC) to provide these services through a "safety-net" program known as the Medically Indigent Services Program (MISP). The ACA will provide California with matching federal funds, if we establish a new program, the Low Income Health Program (LIHP), to serve those who are receiving service through the MISP and to serve an expanded population. All California counties are working on plans to implement LIHP earlier than 2014. These are the improvements – a more streamlined program, matching federal funds and service not just to the indigent but also to the low-income.

There are, however, two areas of concern. First, there's just not enough money to serve those in need – even with the additional matching federal funds. Those involved in the discussions regarding the conversion of the MISP to LIHP recognize the necessity of building in limits on the number of individuals admitted to the program because of the limits on funding. In 2010, CRMC reported that 16,737 people were enrolled in MISP; 14,000 of whom were from the Fresno metropolitan area. (One factor which affects the costs of both programs is that the population served has greater health care needs. The great majority of current MISP enrollees have chronic conditions, which require a higher level of ongoing care.) It is estimated that 46,000 individuals will be eligible for the new LIHP program and no one yet is predicting what the limit on the number of enrollees will be.

Second, some of those currently receiving service will not be eligible for the LIHP as they are not citizens or legal residents of the United States. Fresno County has a long history of providing health care service to undocumented individuals. That history is about to change since any funds which are allocated to serve the undocumented population (through the continuation of a separate MISP) will not be eligible for federal matching funds – a specific provision of the ACA. So, of the \$20 million that had been allocated for MISP in the past, \$18 million will probably go to the LIHP.

So once the \$2 million has been spent, the undocumented and those who can't get into the LIHP because of enrollment caps, will have no recourse for their health care needs other than the emergency room.

We've made some improvements; we have more yet to make.

Did you know? More than 30% of our children in Fresno are obese and the number is growing.

New Project at Metro Challenges Families to Get Up and Get Moving

By Karen Clifton, Hunger & Nutrition Program Director

It's a crisp, sunny Saturday morning at Holmes Community Center in Central Fresno, as families and individuals gather for what is sure to be a great workout. Usually quiet, on this morning you can hear adults and children counting down exercises and the loud calls from their inspiring leader to work hard as they try to attain their goal of a healthier lifestyle.

Since January, community members of all ages have been running, lifting sand bags and doing sit-ups as part of Fresno Metro Ministry's newest project – Fit Family Challenge. The project, which is funded by The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities initiative, has been providing free fitness and nutrition classes every Saturday to residents living in Central and Southeast Fresno. The project aims to show families how they can utilize resources available to them at their community centers and school playgrounds to get healthy and fit.

Fit Family's biggest supporter, three-time World Champion Boxer and owner of Team Jab, Jenifer Alcorn, has been donating her time to motivate families and individuals to get up and get moving.

"More than a third of Fresno County residents are obese. We have children who are doing very little physical activity, if any, and are now being diagnosed in high numbers with Type 2 Diabetes... a disease that's preventable," said Alcorn. "With the staggering number of people being diagnosed with preventable disease due to lack of exercise and poor diet, I knew I had to sign-on to this project."

According to the California Department of Education, the childhood obesity rate in Fresno County is more than 35%, which is higher than the state average of 31%. With obesity rates at an all time high, many experts say that more children than ever before are being diagnosed with Type 2 Diabetes, Heart Disease and High Blood Pressure, something that has not been prevalent in children before.

"I'm really hoping this program will give families the tools they need to get motivated to move and not be afraid to use the resources that are around them. You can utilize your parks, community centers and school playgrounds to get the same workout you can get in a gym and Fit Family does a wonderful job of showing people how to do that," said Alcorn.

Rachael Anderson, a resident of Central Fresno and participant of the program, has been attending with her two children, both 5 years old, since February. According to Anderson, Fit Family was just the motivation she needed to get her family on track to being healthy.

"It has really made a difference in my family's life. I started exercising five times a week, we are more active with our children and I am training for my first 5K race," said Anderson. "Fit Family is very motivating and it's nice to workout with so many people from different cultures and backgrounds. When we're out here working towards the same goal, we are all the same."

Her children are one of the main reasons for Anderson's participation in the program.

"Being a working mom, if I couldn't bring my kids with me I wouldn't be able to attend," said Anderson. "As parents, we set the example for our children and this program really allows families to work together to be healthier."

Since Fit Family started, more than 200 individuals, parents and children have taken the Fit Family Challenge and the turnout continues to grow.

"I think the reason this program has been so successful is consistency. Fresno Metro and I have been out here, rain or shine, to help residents live a healthier lifestyle through diet and exercise," said Alcorn. "It would be wonderful to see residents exercising or playing at their community centers and parks every night of the week. I really do hope participants can inspire more people to do that with them."



Father and daughter get fit together

Metro Mission Statement

Fresno Metro Ministry is a faith-based organization that works to create a more respectful, compassionate and inclusive community that promotes social and economic justice.

Metro advocates for change in community and institutional systems through collaboratives involving individuals, organizations, elected officials, and religious institutions. Currently Metro advocates for:

- Health Care Access
- Nutrition Education and Food Security
- Clean Air and a Healthy Environment
 - Cultural and Religious Diversity and Understanding
 - Supportive Human Services

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Leadership Fresno Steps Up to Revitalize Southeast Fresno Community Garden

By Tom Matott, Gardens Manager

The Al Radka Community Garden in Southeast Fresno underwent a much needed make-over, thanks to the contributions and hard work of Leadership Fresno- Class 27. Metro has worked with Leadership Fresno for the past few months to pull together resources to revitalize abandoned plots and restore nutrients to the soil so Southeast Fresno gardeners can continue to provide healthy food for their families.

Originally, the project was planned as a simple clean-up day to remove weeds and green waste from unused plots and pathways, but it evolved into an amazing effort from local businesses and community partners to create a more functional garden space for residents to enjoy.

“It has been a pleasure partnering with Fresno Metro Ministry and the City of Fresno PARCS Department to revitalize the Al Radka Community Garden,” said Kimberly Houlding-Kaufmann, Leadership Fresno Community Garden Project Coordinator. “This was an incredible opportunity to give back to the community and address our hunger and obesity issues by reviving a garden that puts healthy food on so many families’ tables.”

Leadership Fresno organized the clean-up event as part of their community service project. They raised more than \$22,000 in resources and brought together

See **Leadership Fresno** page 5

New Folks at Metro...

Metro is proud to welcome a new members to the Board – **Rev. Booker T. Lewis II** and new staff member **Chanel Ruiz-Mendez**.

Rev. Lewis is the Pastor at Rising Star Missionary Baptist Church and comes to the Metro Board with a wealth of experience in community service that relates to improving family and cultural relationships.

Rev. Lewis’ respected leadership role in the faith community will be an asset in Metro’s efforts to connect with new diverse populations. Additionally, his presence will continue Metro’s tradition of a strong faith-based perspective on our Board.

Chanel Ruiz-Mendez is the newest addition to the Metro team. As Development Director, she is responsible for all aspects of Metro’s fund development program, including donor relations, special events and all aspects of the organization’s communication plan.

Chanel comes to Metro with 10 years of public relations experience, specializing in multicultural community outreach, media relations, event coordination and government affairs. She also has extensive leadership experience, having served on numerous non-profit Boards in the community, including La Visionaria Guild of Children’s Hospital, Down Syndrome Association of Central California and Fresno’s Leading Young Professionals.

Thank You for Your Service...

Metro would like to express our sincere gratitude to **Devoya Mayo** for three years of service as our Office Coordinator. Not only did Devoya maintain the everyday operations of the front office, she was instrumental in the success of Metro’s Anniversary Dinners, Choir Concerts and Community Resource Directory.

Thank you, Devoya, for your service to Metro.

Leadership Fresno

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community partners such as, Quiring General, Granville Homes, 84 Lumber, High Sierra Trail Crew, local Hmong cultural group Suab Hmoob Txuj Ci and many others, donating time and resources to make the project a success.

One of the most crucial donations came from the *High Sierra Volunteer Trail Crew's Environmental Reclamation Team*. This group of volunteers maintains trails in the Sierras keeping them free of trash and other debris. The Environmental Reclamation Team's work includes cleaning up the remnants of illegal marijuana grow sites after they are eradicated by law enforcement. The illegal marijuana sites employ plastic irrigation materials, which never degrade and all are often left behind to pollute our National forests. The Trail Crew donated materials recovered in its cleanup efforts, including lumber, irrigation drip line and hand tools. The use of these tools will allow positive construction to come from what could have been environmental destruction.

Al Radka garden originally consisted of ninety-eight 10' X 20' plots bordered by decomposed granite, which led to gardeners wanting larger contiguous plots and an efficient way to keep the rock dust out of their soil.

This project enabled gardeners to expand by combining plots and building raised bed boxes around them. Other improvements included roto-tilling and an addition of 50 yards of compost to the plots, construction of two pergolas, removal of green waste, planting of a community herb bed and grape vines at the pergolas and the infilling of pathways with new decomposed granite.

The response from gardeners has been overwhelmingly positive and has recruited new gardeners in the process. Al Radka garden has always struggled to rent every plot, but within two weeks of project completion, every plot at the site has been rented and is being actively worked on. Volunteers also worked together to create several small plots designated as community plots for the planting of herbs, flowers and fruit trees.

If you are interested in starting a community garden or would like to help support Metro's garden projects, please contact Tom Matott at tom@fresnometmin.org or (559) 485-1416.



*Radka Gardner and LF Volunteer
revitalize plots*

Childhood Obesity

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have been slashed, as a result of the State budget cuts, and the impact is being felt across the board. Schools are suffering drastically, as well as community-based organizations serving the low-income, underserved and un-served. Counties, too, are cutting their budgets at all levels and the problem is only expected to get worse before it gets better.

Nearly 35% of children in Fresno County are overweight and/or obese as are 63% of adults, compared to 57% statewide. According to the U.S. Surgeon General's office, obesity is now the fastest-growing cause of illness and death in America today. Additionally, CCPHA's research shows that 69% of Adolescents 12-17 years of age and 53.1% of children 2-11 years old in Fresno County are consuming at least one soda a day. These alarming rates coincide with the increase in diabetes rates, particularly among our young population and people of color.

This year, Assemblymember Monning (D-27th district) introduced AB 669, which would levy a penny tax per fluid ounce on soda and other sugary drinks. This includes drinks with high fructose corn syrup and no nutritional value. Other drinks that fall under this category include: Vitamin waters, energy drinks and sport drinks. Although it is expected that this soda tax will be a multi-year effort, we are working diligently, locally to build a strong grassroots support. This tax can help mitigate some of the problems that the soda industry has created. Much of the research shows that soda is strongly correlated and has a significant role in the obesity epidemic.

In Fresno County, we see the significant need for this funding to help improve the quality of meals being served at schools, to establish school gardens at every school, to keep PE in schools and strengthen after-school programs. Locally, people would decide what is most important and the money would come through the California Department of Public Health through a grant application process. This funding is especially significant and crucial for obesity prevention efforts and improved long-term children's health.

The State Board of Equalization estimates that approximately \$42.9 million raised by this tax (AB 669) would be delivered to Fresno County and of that 61% (\$26.3 million) could be used directly in the classroom and for teacher retention. Additionally, 22% (\$9.2 million) would go to school PE and healthy lunch programs and 17% (\$7.4 million) would go towards local youth programs such as sports and after-school programs.

There is no question that this soda tax just makes sense for our community. Given the crisis that our state and counties are in, both financially and with the obesity epidemic, this is a rational and powerful strategy for both education and obesity prevention programs.

Sixty Years of Neglect and Unlawful Behavior: Darling Rendering Plant in West Fresno

By Sarah Sharpe, Environmental Health Program Director

Fresno Metro Ministry has long been concerned with the disproportionate burden of health issues and poverty in certain parts of our city – specifically Southeast and Southwest Fresno. Most recently, we have become aware of the fact that the majority of major sources of air pollution labeled by the Environmental Protection Agency as Toxic Release Inventory (TRI) sites in our city are located in West Fresno.

There are cumulative health impacts related to multiple exposures from multiple sources on the same population, especially in the 93706 zip code, where in 2008, more people were hospitalized for asthma than in any other zip code in Fresno County.¹

Asthma is only one of the chronic diseases that are prevalent in West Fresno, but it is especially relevant because we know there is a direct link to exposure to air pollution. Accordingly, Fresno County has some of the highest asthma rates in the state and

West Fresno experiences a disproportionate amount of that burden along with their disproportionate pollution burden. We believe there is a strong relationship between the two.

Since the early 1950s, Darling International rendering plant has trucked in hundreds of tons of offal (inedible animal byproducts) daily, in unsecured trucks that belch clouds of diesel particulate matter into residential neighborhoods, and leave trails of blood and bits of animal carcasses all over the streets of West Fresno. Metro's Environmental Health Program has joined with Communities for a New California (CNC) to support Concerned Citizens for West Fresno (CCWF) in their efforts to achieve environmental justice and a healthier community by addressing pollution from Darling International's meat rendering plant in West Fresno.

The group has also formed a legal partnership with California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA), which has already proven to be fruitful. On February 1, a proposed abatement agreement was released by the City of Fresno. The history of this struggle is long and involved, community complaints go back to the 1960s and in 1988 the facility had to shut down for “nearly two weeks because of odor problems.”² In fact, an “odor nuisance” ordinance was passed in 1989 to give the Fresno City Council the power to address community concerns.



Mary Curry speaks at Darling Press Conference at City Hall

Metro has been working with CCWF in our San Joaquin Cumulative Health Impacts Project to document and map the unfair concentration of pollution sources in low-income communities and communities of color across the Valley. In conjunction with UC Davis, we held a community mapping workshop with residents and advocates from West Fresno. The resulting maps, which portrayed a visual representation of our city and how the areas with the highest percentages of people of color have the most air pollution sources, were presented to the City Council during their April 14 hearing on the Darling issue.

With regards to the Darling rendering plant, we do not know exactly what the environmental health impacts of the facility are because it has never gone through the proper permitting process. This is a major disservice to the local residents because the City of Fresno is unable to ensure that they have completed their due diligence in protecting their citizens' health from the operations of the rendering plant. Although the odor is a severe public nuisance, that has serious social and economic impacts, we are even more concerned with the possible impacts on human health.

As Mary Curry, chairwoman of CCWF often states, “the City of Fresno is one body, if one part of the body is ill, the entire body should respond... which is why all Frensnans should care about this issue.”

West Fresno has long been neglected on many fronts by past City administrations, in fact 13 different mayors have held office since Darling first opened in 1947. Today, newly-elected Councilmember Oliver Baines has brought the matter back to the City Council. On April 14, he sought a determination that Darling must apply for the Conditional Use Permit that the law requires of all other businesses.

This has presented the Council with a great opportunity to show West Fresno that City leadership intends to give them equal attention and protection. Unfortunately, still no definitive response on the issue has come out of the two closed sessions that the Council has held to date.

Now is the time to demonstrate to West Fresno that they are a valued part of our city and will receive the same treatment as all other residents of the City of Fresno. We see it as a simple choice: either uphold the current laws in protection of your constituents or allow special treatment for corporations in the City of Fresno. Please continue to remind your representatives that Fresno is one body of people and each district should be equally valued. This is not just an issue that affects people in West Fresno – we need to have clean air for all!

¹ Central Valley Health Policy Institute, California State University, Fresno. 1625 East Shaw Ave, Suite 146, Fresno, CA 93710

² Clemings, Betsy. Council OKs law policing industry odor: Rendering problems stirred city. The Fresno Bee, April 28, 1989.

Safe Environments for Our Children

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26 can adversely affect reproduction and 13 can cause birth defects.

“When we use pesticides around our children, we poison our future,” said Maria Arevalo of Latinos United for Clean Air and a mother of six. “We can control pests safely and effectively without using toxic chemicals.”

Scientists also link pesticide exposure at school to asthma and learning disabilities such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). When compared to other age categories, school-aged children from ages 6 to 11 register the highest levels of pesticides in their bodies, with an average of seven pesticides per child.

In 2000, California passed landmark legislation that reduced the use of some pesticides in schools. However, we’ve fallen behind in recent years as other states have taken even stronger steps to protect the health of schoolchildren, teachers and school staff. New York and Connecticut have recently passed strong laws that ban the use of certain pesticides at schools. Current California law, by comparison, only requires notification and encourages transition away from harmful school pesticides.

A 2007 California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) survey revealed that most schools using the safer practices found them to be more effective and no more costly than the conventional practices they had used in the past. Although the DPR offers least toxic pest management training to schools, only about one-third of school districts have yet to take advantage of the training. The 2007 survey found that 40 percent of school districts continue to use high-exposure methods for treating weed problems and only 60 percent use low-exposure baits for ant management.

Fresno Metro Ministry in conjunction with the Center for Environmental Health has co-sponsored legislation authored by California Senator Mark DeSaulnier to reduce dangerous pesticide use in all K-12 public schools and preschools in California. The Healthy Schools Act of 2011 (SB 394) is intended to further reduce pesticide use in favor of greater adoption of the “green” alternative – Integrated Pest Management (IPM) – which emphasizes effective, non-chemical treatment methods that include eliminating sources of food, water and shelter that attract pests in the first place.

Fresno Unified School District adopted an Integrated Pest Management policy in 2001, which moved them in the right direction. However, part of the policy included an oversight committee, which has ceased to exist. John Quinto, the FUSD Maintenance Service Manager for Operations, shared that his staff “do everything they can to not spray” to ensure that students and staff aren’t needlessly exposed to harsh chemicals. He emphasized one of FUSD’s core beliefs of safety: “making it a priority to provide a safe working and learning environment.” They have even made it a goal to reduce the number of gallons purchased of the chemical FUSD uses to control weeds.

Metro recently hosted a press conference to release the report “*Green Schools Within Reach: Moving Beyond The Healthy Schools Act of 2000*” that explores the current state of pesticide use in schools. The event was held at a local Fresno preschool, Nosworthy’s Nursery, because of their green pest control practices, including no routine broadcast spraying. When they’ve had pest infestations, they have taken the least toxic approach at all times, including treating ant problems with cinnamon.

“We see stories of successful green schools across the state,” said Paul Towers of Pesticide Watch Education Fund, one of the authors of the report. “From the second largest school district in the nation, to the tiniest of districts, California schools have proven that using green pest management is feasible, more effective and financially sound.”



Toxic pesticides still being used at local schools

Your Contribution Makes a Difference!

Without your support, Metro would not be able to do the advocacy work so needed in our underserved communities.

We know the recession has affected so many organizations, as it has Metro. Now more than ever, we urge you to once again support Metro with a generous contribution. We’ve enclosed a contribution envelope and remember... There’s no such thing as a contribution to small.

To learn more about Metro’s programs or to become a sponsor, contact Chanel Ruiz-Mendez at 559-485-1416 or via email at chanel@fresnometmin.org.

Thank you!



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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Faith Community Comes Together to Support Environmental Issues

By Mike Wells, Environmental Health Program Assistant Director

In May, Bethany Inmercity Church hosted the third gathering of California Interfaith Power and Light (CIPL) in Fresno. The evening included a screening of the film “Nourish,” which offers a big-picture view of our food system, starting with a global perspective and finishing with tips for individual and group action. CIPL provides a great interfaith discussion guide to accompany the film – both available for community use.

The Fresno CIPL Working Group was born out of a desire shared by several faith communities in Fresno to continue a discussion about how we can begin a sustainable network to address environmental issues throughout the Valley. During the 2010 Fresno Earth Day Celebration, Fresno Metro Ministry participated in the *Faith and the Environment* forum, a one-hour conversation between religious leaders from many faith traditions. Two main sentiments shared by participants were that care for creation and environmental justice were common themes amongst the represented faith communities and that there was a desire to continue the conversation on a regular basis.

As a result, last July Metro hosted a faith leaders lunch to consider how the faith community could be engaged in the many efforts, locally and statewide, to improve the environment and protect those who are most affected by pollution and climate change. Great progress was made, including several congregations supporting California Clean Cars and the successful “NO on Prop 23” campaigns. Another positive outcome of the event is that Metro has become an active participant in the Interfaith Social Justice Collaborative (ISJC).

As a result, Metro, ISJC and leaders from three local congregations organized *Caring for Creation: Cool Congregation* – a gathering of the Fresno faith community to discuss climate change and environmental concerns. California Interfaith Power and Light partnered with us to plan an event open to the public and a clergy breakfast the following day.

More than 50 people took time out of their busy schedules to learn more about the national movement led by Interfaith Power and Light to address climate change through the faith community. Our guest speakers, Rachel Medema of CIPL and Betsy Reifsnider of Catholic Charities of Stockton, shared many opportunities to get involved and inspirational stories. The lively discussions were a great venue to learn about various initiatives to protect the environment and led to a commitment to meet on a continual basis to strengthen the interfaith environmental movement in Fresno. The next day, a dozen leaders representing Fresno’s diverse faith traditions met with Medema to discuss the possibilities of working together as a CIPL working group.

Since the initial CIPL events, the group has continued to meet bi-monthly. Each meeting is hosted by a different faith community, in a different part of the city. There are always opportunities for communities of faith to make a difference globally as well as locally. CIPL has great resources to help congregations be more sustainable – saving money, while saving energy.

Stay tuned to Metro’s facebook page, e-news updates or contact Metro at 485-1416 to get information on CIPL events coming this summer.