

A Healthier Hawaii

Clarence T.C. Ching devoted his life to caring for those in need. Through his efforts in establishing Kukui Gardens and the continued efforts of the foundation that bears his name, many lives have been changed for the better. However, as these great strides are being made, new problems arise.

One such new problem can cause diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and heart attacks. It affects 28.5% of children in Hawaii, 39.8% of children in Hawaii living under the federal poverty level, and costs Hawaii approximately \$100 million dollars every year.¹ If this condition cannot be fixed in childhood, it has an 80% chance of continuing into adulthood.² Thankfully, this condition can be remedied and prevented. What is this mystery danger? Childhood obesity. Although this problem did not significantly affect Mr. Ching's generation, I believe, based on his past charitable actions, he would implore the people and government of Hawaii to fix this epidemic. To successfully combat childhood obesity, Hawaii must attack with a three point plan.

The plan should focus on a bottom-up approach. Engraining healthy lifestyle choices into the children of today could have a multi-generational impact as children often pick up lifestyle habits from their parents. As such, the first step of this plan should consist of an extensive informational campaign within Hawaii's elementary schools. While current Hawaii curriculum consists of Health classes, children should ideally be reached outside of school where they are making their actual lifestyle decisions. To do so the Hawaii Department of Education, Department of Health, and Department of Human Services should collaborate to produce online resources, educational games, and mobile device applications with tips and information on how to live a healthy lifestyle. This method will effectively

reach children and make learning about healthy lifestyles engaging, not just another class in school.

The second part of the plan should consist of affording children more exercise opportunities. Most children love to play and exercise. The major problem in a child's exercise habits lies in the lack of opportunities and space for children to exercise. The availability of physical education has been steadily decreasing in Hawaii's schools and increasing urbanization has reduced exercise space for inner-city youth. Hawaii can solve this problem by providing these exercise opportunities to children through increased physical education in school as well as free or low-cost afterschool sports programs provided by youth and charitable organizations.

Finally, Hawaii's congressional delegation should lobby for reform in terms of the government's food stamp program. Since a disproportionate number of children in low-income families are obese, governmental food assistance programs should be reformed to set rules requiring recipients to spend certain percentages of their government aid on each food group. By doing so, these families will eat a greater variety of foods and in healthier proportions.

Implementing this program will significantly reduce childhood obesity in Hawaii and keep in line with the strong moral compass of Mr. Ching. Through these efforts our community can work toward a more perfect society, a healthier Hawaii.

Work Cited

1. The Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative. *Hawaii State Fact Sheet*. 2007. <http://www.childhealthdata.org/docs/nsch-docs/hawaii-pdf.pdf> (accessed November 22, 2012).
2. National Collaborative on Childhood Obesity Research. *Childhood Obesity in the United States*. 2012. http://www.nccor.org/downloads/ChildhoodObesity_020509.pdf (accessed November 21, 2012).

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