



NATIONAL EARLY CHILDHOOD OBESITY PREVENTION INITIATIVE

The Children's Museum of Manhattan (CMOM)—in cooperation with the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Association of Children's Museums (ACM)—will help address a critical gap in national obesity-prevention efforts by testing an arts- and science-based health education model for families with young children.

CMOM has been awarded a National Leadership grant of \$838,000 from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the primary source of federal support for the nation's 123,000 libraries and 17,500 museums. Seed funds to develop the initiative were generously provided by a \$250,000 grant from the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund and ongoing program support from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

A critical component of the IMLS grant will be CMOM's adaptation of the NIH's community-tested *We Can!*[™] (Ways to Enhance Children's Activity & Nutrition!) **Energize Our Families: Parent Program**, which was originally developed for children ages 8-13. CMOM's adaptation of the *We Can!* parent program will be piloted with families of children ages 2-5 years and evaluated at East Side House Settlement public housing facility in the Bronx, and then in New Orleans in partnership with the Louisiana Children's Museum. The project will utilize a curriculum based on current science and an arts-based methodology. The project includes early childhood obesity prevention programs for high need communities; professional development for parents, health care workers and educators; family health programs and a new permanent health exhibit at CMOM; exhibit replication plans for national distribution with small museums and community centers; and evaluation findings that will help inform the practices of community leaders, health educators and policymakers.

This program intends to have impact on several levels:

- Demonstrate a new model for social innovation by combining health research, early childhood pedagogy, and an arts-based methodology to impact family behavior.
- Increase the capacity of communities to participate in obesity-prevention efforts by creating and disseminating a set of scientifically-based, replicable, early childhood health programs, exhibits and resources.
- Improve childhood obesity-prevention efforts by providing consistent messaging across a number of venues, and connecting the medical and health community to a network of museums and community organizations.
- Demonstrate the impact of a museum-led response to tackling deep community issues such as childhood obesity by disseminating research and best practices.
- Influence national policy by contributing to the body of literature about the effectiveness of early childhood health interventions, and providing NIH with additional data on methods to prevent obesity in children as young as two years of age.

As childhood obesity rates continue to challenge our country, local and national leaders are seeking innovative ways to foster good eating habits and exercise at an early age and to change behaviors that are at the root of obesity. This initiative leverages CMOM's deep knowledge and expertise in early childhood learning and family engagement, and the success of the IMLS funded *PlayWorks*[™] early learning exhibit. CMOM will build off of its work at East Side House Settlement (ESHS) in the South Bronx for the past four years, where it has demonstrated positive results implementing family-based arts and literacy programs that prepare young children for success in school. The project also builds on a longstanding partnership with the nationally acclaimed Louisiana Children's Museum (LCM)—in 2006, CMOM partnered with LCM to adapt *PlayWorks*[™] for the families and communities affected by the Katrina disaster.

In 2008, CMOM hosted a *We Can!* training event with the Community Health Care Association of New York State (CHCANYS) for nearly 100 health care professionals. That year, CMOM formalized its partnership with the NIH, entering into a Memorandum of Understanding that recognized their shared commitment to addressing the epidemic of childhood obesity. In October 2008, CMOM received the prestigious *Healthy Youth for a Healthy Future Champion Award* from the Surgeon General of the United States, recognizing CMOM's creative partnerships with the NIH and CHCANYS. Locally, CMOM is collaborating with the New York City Housing Authority, the New York City Department of Education, and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to connect this initiative to citywide efforts to improve the health, well-being and academic success of children in high need communities.