Strategic Plan
2019-2024
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This strategic plan was developed to guide the efforts of Eat Right Montana (ERM) and serve as a catalyst for collaborative approaches to meet the needs of Montanans most in need. ERM strives to amplify the contribution of nutrition and physical activity professionals while advocating for evidence-based practices and policies which support healthy lifestyles.

The ability to eat healthy foods in Montana depends on accessibility, availability and affordability. Thirty of Montana’s 56 counties, encompassing almost 72,000 people, contain areas considered food deserts.\(^1\) While those living in food deserts face a burden of food insecurity, others in Montana face barriers related to the consumption of nutritious foods. In Montana, 116,120 or about 1 in 9 people are struggling with hunger and an estimated 37,000 Montana children go hungry on a daily basis.

In Montana

As lifestyles in the United States grow increasingly sedentary, an alarming rate of Montanans fail to achieve even the minimum levels of physical activity recommended for staying healthy. In addition, physical activity opportunities remain limited built environment to support active transportation and leisure time can benefit health outcomes.

Conversely, obesity rates are frequently higher in underserved communities with limited resources for safe, fun, and engaging physical activity for all ages. In Montana, obesity prevalence is highest (14.5\%) among children in homes with incomes at or below 50\% of the federal poverty level.\(^2\) With the relationship between poverty and childhood obesity, it’s not surprising that Indian Country faces very high rates. Multiple reports put childhood obesity among American Indians in Montana at or above 50\%.\(^3\)

HEALTHY EATING

ERM supports evidence-based healthy eating practices that seek to:

- Promote purchases of prepared healthier food and beverages in restaurants, worksites and other community settings.
- Promote purchases of packaged healthier food and beverages in grocery stores, corner stores and other retail settings.
- Improve healthy vending policies in public and private worksites, hospitals, schools and government buildings.
- Enhance food service practices/nutrition standards with reduced sodium content in community prepared food settings.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ACTIVE LIVING
ERM supports evidence-based active living practices that seek to:

- Increase infrastructure in the built environment to facilitate active transportation and enhance access to physical activity opportunities.
- Strengthen policies for the built environment (community-scale, street-scale, transportation policies) that enhance access to physical activity opportunities.
- Increase the density and quality of recreation and fitness facilities in Montana communities
- Provide and support community programs designed to increase physical activity.

This strategic plan represents the framework which will guide the direction of ERM from 2020-2025. The goals, strategies, and activities in this plan align with the mission and vision of ERM and out partner organizations.

EAT RIGHT MONTANA HISTORY
The Eat Right Montana Coalition was established in 1992. The eleven member council was appointed by Governor Stan Stephens under the Montana Access to Food and Nutrition Act. The portion of the Act creating the Council was repealed in 1997, effectively moving the coalition under the umbrella of the Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Bureau within the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS).

In 2005, the coallation broke away from the DPHHS and became a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Today, the coalition includes a diverse group of individuals and organizations who have come together with the common goal of providing consistent, science-based nutrition and physical activity messages to all Montanans.

HISTORY
- 1990s and 2000s: Provided a monthly newsletter on nutrition and physical activity education that was published in local papers
- 2001-2004: Sponsored Make a Difference Make a Change mini-grants for schools
- 2006: Began providing mini-grants to WIC programs and extension agents to do nutrition and physical activity education
- 2013: Began to administer the Health Hero award, presented during the fall meeting to a person nominated for excellence in nutrition or physical activity. Continues to administer these awards annually.
- 2013-Present:
  - Sponsors the Montana Breast Feeding Coalition and Montana Partnership to End Childhood Hunger
  - Provides professional development scholarships for nutrition and physical activity partners.
  - Administers Health Hero Awards
  - Participates in legislative advocacy events to support nutrition and physical activity legislation and policies.
VISION

Optimal health through nutrition, fitness and wellness for all Montanans.

MISSION

Unify a statewide network of health and wellness alliances through sharing of state and local data, evidence-based programming, best practices, strategic prevention, current health trends, funding opportunities, and statewide advocacy for health promotion.

STRATEGIC PARTNERS

Action for Healthy Kids
American Heart Association
Grow Montana
Headwaters Foundation
Montana Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Montana DPHHS, Nutrition and Physical Activity Program
Montana DPHHS, School Health Program
Montana Food Bank Network
Montana Office of Public Instruction
Montana No Kid Hungry
Montana Partnership to End Childhood Hunger
Montana School Nutrition Association
Montana State Breast Feeding Coalition
Montana State University Extension, Nutrition Education Programs
Montana School Nutrition Association
Montana State University Extension, Nutrition Education Programs
Montana Team Nutrition, Montana State University
Rocky Mountain Development Council
SHAPE MT
Sprout Oral Health

In 2015, Eat Right Montana brought the Montana Action for Healthy Kids teams under the Eat Right Montana umbrella. Action for Healthy Kids is a non profit organization mobilizing school professionals, families, and communities to take actions towards increasing healthy eating habits and physical activity and building healthier schools where kids thrive. ERM invites AFHK teams to participate in guiding the direction of both mutually aligned organizations.
PROCESS OVERVIEW

In developing our strategic plan, the executive board participated in a thoughtful strategic planning process facilitated by the Department of Public Health and Human Services. Eat Right Montana members provided feedback and helped develop fundamental goals and strategies.

Key sources of data, references, and other resources were compiled to inform this planning process. Related existing Montana plans were pooled to guide the design of the Strategic Plan and to distinguish opportunities for collaboration, integration, and resource sharing among partners. The focus areas and strategies included in this document represent the work that Eat Right Montana seeks to assemble partners around and dedicate available resources to accomplish over the next five years.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND THREATS (SWOT)

Participants identified a number of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to ERM’s scope of work. Themes that emerged under strengths were that the organization is a 501(c)(3) with bylaws and existing members; the organization has a reputation dating back nearly 30 years; and the organization maintains key partnership as a fiscal sponsor for multiple programs. Weakness included the lack of paid board members, gaps in membership, inconsistent partner involvement, lack of promotion and advertising efforts and inconsistent messaging.

Participants identified opportunities to adjust messaging and support to communities most in need and identify new strategic partnerships. Threats that were identified included dwindling funding sources, difficulty engaging Montanans from different backgrounds, and the recruitment and retention of members.

STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

1. Provide a platform for ERM members to network, promote events, and share best practices related to nutrition and physical activity work in their local communities and statewide.
2. Support nutrition and physical activity professional development of members.
3. Improve the health of Montanans by influencing key food, nutrition and health initiatives on the local, state, regional and national level.
GOALS → STRATEGIES → ACTIVITIES

Goal 1: Provide a platform for ERM members to network, promote events, and share best practices related to nutrition and physical activity work in their local communities and statewide.

Strategy 1: Member Meetings
   1.1.1— Provide annual meetings that meet member’s needs, including a variety of relevant program offerings.
   1.1.2— Invite prospective members & strategic partners to meetings.
   1.1.3— Utilize local liaisons to present at local meetings annually on value of membership.

Strategy 2: Communication
   1.2.1— Maintain ERM website and social media accounts.
   1.2.2— Communicate with ERM/AFHK membership regularly about upcoming events, success stories, and relevant nutrition and physical activity news.

Strategy 3: Networking Opportunities
   1.3.1— Inform members of opportunities to participate in meetings and conferences hosted by partners.
   1.3.2— Facilitate connections between strategic partners.

Strategy 4: Partner Recognition
   1.4.1— Present annual Health Hero Awards to businesses, organizations, or individuals who go above and beyond the call of duty to support nutrition and physical activity in their community.

Goal 2: Support nutrition and physical activity professional development of members.

Strategy 1: Promotion
   2.1.1— Promote partner conferences and other educational opportunities to ERM/AFHK membership via website, newsletters, listserv emails, and social media accounts.
   2.1.2— Work with partner organizations to sponsor speakers or events.

Strategy 2: Scholarships
   2.2.1— Provide scholarships to members to support continuing education.
   2.2.2— Provide scholarships to the planning and hosting of continuing education events.
Goal 3: Improve the health of Montanans by influencing key food, nutrition and health initiatives on the local, state, regional and national level.

Strategy 1: Engage Policy Makers

3.1.1—Advocate for sound nutrition policies to reduce malnutrition, prevent and manage chronic diseases, and improve health outcomes.

3.1.2—Contribute to or plan legislative events to increase awareness of the valuable impact nutrition and dietetics professionals in Montana can make on health outcomes.

3.1.3—Guide Members at ERM/AFHK meetings and through listserv on how/when to contact legislators.

Strategy 2: Align Organization Policies with Partners

3.2.1—Align activities and goals with those of strategic partners.

3.2.2—Update messaging based on current evidence and policy.

Strategy 3: Monitor Legislation

3.3.1—Monitor state and federal policies and legislation and when necessary, advise members to act.

3.3.2—Feature active nutrition and physical activity legislation on the ERM website during the legislative session.

The strategies outlined in this plan will not all happen in one year. Some of them will take five years or even longer to accomplish. Most of these strategies will also take the work of multiple engaged partners across multiple sectors to be successful. Even though this work is not easy or quick, it is necessary for improving the health and lives of Montanans. If you have questions about anything in this plan or if you are interested in leading or collaborating in work to implement strategies of the plan, feel free to contact any of the Eat Right Montana board members listed on the organization website.
ERM/AFHK INTERNAL OPERATIONAL GOALS 2020-2025

Goal #1: Support and expand membership

- Evaluate existing membership gaps and reach out to potential partners.
- Identify and capitalize on existing opportunities to engage members, such as 1) the State Health Improvement Plan workgroups on chronic disease prevention and healthy mothers, babies, and youth and 2) attend as a vendor or present at statewide conferences held by organizations that are important to or hosted by members.
- Develop an “elevator pitch” to help members share Eat Right Montana’s story.
- Establish member services such as 1) a webinar series, 2) networking opportunities, and 3) program or educational materials.

Goal #2: Strengthen and sustain funding

- Investigate and act upon opportunities for enlisting part-time support in the form of an AmeriCorps or VISTA position, a student intern, or practicum student.
- Research grant opportunities to capitalize on long history and 501(c)3 status.
- Further develop sponsorship program to appeal to potential corporate sponsors, such as creating different sponsorship levels that can be promoted by displaying sponsor logos on the Eat Right Montana website.

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Eat Right Montana would like to thank the members and partners who assisted with the creation of this strategic plan. This organization and others like it would not be able to function without your support. ERM will continue to work with partners around the state to contribute to the improved health and wellness of all Montanans.

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Sources

1 Montana Food Bank Network, “Hunger in Montana”
2 Centers for Disease Control, “Childhood Obesity Facts”
3 Montana Department of Agriculture “Moving Toward Food Sovereignty: Assessing Food Systems on Montana’s Indian Reservations”