



TO BEAT OBESITY

**Tennessee ranks as one of five states in the country
with the highest rates of obesity.**

by Susan Cooper

TENNESSEE'S BATTLE

The Trust for America's Health's most recent report indicates that adult obesity rates not only did not decrease in a single state in 2008 but increased in 23 states. Department of Health data show the increase in Tennessee's obesity rate unfortunately has kept pace with the increase nationally.

While these rankings don't surprise us, we take encouragement from data that indicate Tennessee citizens are moving in the direction of healthier lives. According to results of the 2009 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System survey, fewer Tennesseans report they have been told by a health provider that they have diabetes than in the two previous years. Overweight and obesity are contributing factors to diabetes.

The value of these reports is in focusing greater attention on the need to address the issue of obesity on both a state and national level. Tennessee's problem with obesity did not develop overnight, and the solution will not come quickly. Managing one's weight is not only a matter of increasing physical activity and making small changes in our nutritional choices but also a matter of other social determinants of health. Southern states face significant challenges, specifically high rates of poverty, which can often lead to people eating low-cost but nutritionally poor food.

The Department of Health continues to address this issue with programs like Get Fit Tennessee, which helps equip people with simple tips and free tools to help them start where they are to develop healthier eating habits and increase physical activity. Get started today at www.getfittn.com.

Tennessee is also working to help its youngest citizens form healthy habits from the begin-



ning. The Department of Health works with the Department of Human Services on the Gold Sneaker Initiative, an innovative program to recognize day care providers that meet stringent requirements for physical activity and nutrition for their students. Tennessee is among 19 states that have nutritional standards for school meals and snacks that are stricter than federal requirements and also one of 27 states with nutritional requirements for foods sold in school vending machines or in school bake sales.

Ultimately, the solution to the obesity crisis, for the nation and the state of Tennessee, lies with individuals and the choices they make every day that impact their health. Take a look at your lifestyle, and you will see there is something you can do to lead a more healthful life. These small steps can add up to big changes that will help move us in the right direction to fight obesity.

Susan Cooper is the commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Health.