

New Houston Mayor, Sylvester Turner, Discusses His Approach to Impact Obesity

The University of Texas School of Public Health notes that obesity is a disease that serves as a gateway to diabetes, stroke and numerous other serious health complications. They also note that obesity is a public health issue because it has reached epidemic proportions, affecting more than a third of our community. Are you willing to use the Office of Mayor to produce billboards and other forms of communication (print material, social media, newsletters, etc.) to disseminate the following public service message? “Warning: Obesity is a disease that is hazardous to your health.”

Sylvester Turner:

Obesity is a serious and growing public health issue with disproportionate impacts on our most vulnerable communities. I believe that a holistic approach, involving not only top-down messaging but also community input and participation, is the only way to effect lasting improvements. I especially am impressed with the success of Oklahoma City in combining a citywide weight-loss challenge, a true commitment to investment in walkable, bikeable infrastructure, and a public education campaign to make significant obesity rate improvements that have stood the test of time. As mayor, I will work to see if a similar model is right for Houston.

All 56 members of the Texas Medical Center are working on obesity. Most institutions are color-coding (red, yellow, green) the high-, medium- and low-calorie items in vending machines and cafeterias. Are you in favor of this approach for the City of Houston and would you work to implement it? How?

Sylvester Turner:

Again, I believe a holistic approach is key. Color-coded vending machines are one way of ensuring that Houstonians have clear and easy access to information that will help them make the healthiest snack choice. But more must be done to engage and inform the public if we are to see lasting change in our obesity rates.

Would you convene a Houston CEO summit to address the obesity epidemic within your first 100 days of office? If so, why? And if not, why not?

Sylvester Turner:

Effectively addressing obesity will require engagement from a variety of stakeholders, including Houston’s major employers. Partnering with the private sector to reduce obesity is not only good for the health of Houstonians, but for our local economy. I look forward to engaging with Houston’s CEOs on ways to improve our city’s overall health.