

For Immediate Release

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Interviews Available

Let's reverse Michigan's Childhood Obesity Epidemic... Together ***Town Halls to address Limited Access to Healthy Foods in Michigan***

January 12, 2016 – The American Heart Association will be hosting two Town Hall meetings in L'Anse and Marquette on January 20th and January 21st to discuss the lack of access to nutritious foods in Baraga and Marquette counties and across the state. The January 20th town hall will be held at the Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa Community College, located at 770 Main St. in L'Anse. The town hall in Marquette will be held on on January 21, 2016, at the Marquette Board of Commissioners in Room 41, located at 234 W. Baraga Avenue in Marquette. There will be two sessions at each town hall; one from 9:30 – 11:00 a.m. and one from 4:30 – 6:00 p.m.

According to The Food Trust, 1.8 million Michigan residents, including 300,000 children, live in communities where they do not have easy, or any, access to affordable healthy food.

For the first time in history, our children are expected to live five years less than their parents due to the high rate of childhood obesity and diseases that are a factor of obesity. In fact, thirty percent of Michigan's population is considered clinically obese. A 2011 report issued by the Michigan Department of Community Health showed 32.6 percent of Michigan's children ages 10-17 were considered overweight or obese.

The Heart Association is working to address this problem and is looking for community members to join this initiative. "We are asking Baraga families, business leaders, school administrators, church leaders and all community members to join us in this campaign," said Ted O'Dell, campaign manager, for the American Heart Association's Michigan Healthy Food Access Campaign. "Together we can bring more healthy food options into the area and ultimately reduce obesity and cardiovascular diseases."

The underlying goal of the Healthy Food Access Campaign is to provide financing and business assistance to healthy food retailers that benefit underserved communities in Michigan, which will allow our citizens to have healthier options available. House Bill 5180 has been introduced by Representative Dave Pangel (R-Berrien Springs), and if implemented would expand opportunities for low-interest loans and grants for those in communities who want to expand their healthy food offerings; increasing healthy food access in communities needing it most. This initiative will help make the healthy choice an easy- and possible - choice in Michigan communities.

Dave Hodgkins, American Heart Association's government relations director in Michigan, stated, "We can't let the childhood obesity epidemic continue. We all need to work together, from the independent convenience store owners to our lawmakers. We need to be the voice for kids in Michigan. Let your state legislators know that with Michigan being the second most agriculturally diverse state in the nation, every resident should have access to healthy food."

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The American Heart Association and the American Stroke Association are devoted to saving people from heart disease and stroke – the two leading causes of death in the world. We team with millions of volunteers to fund innovative research, fight for stronger public health policies, and provide lifesaving tools and information to prevent and treat these diseases. The Dallas-based American Heart Association is the nation's oldest and largest voluntary organization dedicated to fighting heart disease and stroke. The American Stroke Association is a division of the American Heart Association. To learn more or to get involved, call 1-800-AHA-USA1, visit heart.org or call any of our offices around the country. Follow us on Facebook and Twitter.