At least 56% of adults and a quarter of all children in Howard County are overweight or obese. As a result, Howard Countians suffer higher rates of heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes than should be expected given our residents’ wealth and high levels of education. If trends continue, this generation of Howard County children may be the first ever to have a lower life expectancy than their parents.

The Horizon Foundation, The Howard County Health Department and their local/state partners, after consulting national obesity prevention experts, launched Howard County, Unsweetened in December of 2012. The campaign is:

- **Evidence and Outcome-Based** – The Foundation has partnered with Yale University’s Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity to evaluate the campaign and provide technical assistance to staff and grantees. The Foundation is also collecting the necessary data to gauge success and has set for itself both two-year and five-year outcome objectives. According to the Rudd Center, “Howard County. Unsweetened.” will be the most evaluated sugary drink campaign in the country.

- **Guided by a National Advisory Committee** – The campaign is guided by a 15 member team of national obesity prevention experts who regularly review data collected and offer suggestions to improve the campaign.

- **Family Centered** – Children who maintain a healthy weight through high school are much more likely to stay at a healthy weight for a lifetime. Parents (particularly moms) are important campaign targets, because they model healthy behavior for their children and make food and drink purchases for their families. Young people are also key to changing family and community norms. Young people will provide campaign leadership and help focus community attention on the current lack of healthy choices available.

- **Focused on Healthy Drink Choices** – In focus groups, Howard County parents stressed the need to focus on one aspect of obesity control at a time. Given that sugary drinks (i.e., soda, juices with added sugar, sports drinks, energy drinks, flavored teas, and flavored waters) are the largest single source of added sugar in a child’s diet and contribute significantly to weight gain, the campaign focuses families on the many healthier drink choices that exist. By the time Howard County children reach the 6th grade, nearly 60% of them are having at least one sugary drink each day (Howard County 6th Grade Survey). Worse still, national research shows that sugary drink consumption grows as children get older.

- **Creating a Culture of Health** – Companies that market and promote unhealthy food and drink choices easily outspend obesity prevention advocates. Experience shows that policy change is the only effective way to improve community health and change norms. For example, our state’s low smoking rate is partially due to progressive tobacco use prevention policies established. With policy change, the places where children and their families learn, work, eat, play, and pray can be transformed into organizations that support healthy drink choices and improve the health and wellness of both the county and the state.

- **Partner/Collaboration Driven** – The campaign is based on the Dahlgren-Whitehead Health Determinants Model. Working with a strong coalition, the Foundation is working to improve the health and wellness of the institutions and systems that drive community health. The campaign will increase the number of affordable healthy food and drink choices available to all children and families and change community norms to make a healthy diet the norm.

**Partnering With:**

- Howard County Schools
- Howard County Government
- Healthy Child Care Program
- After-School Programs
- Chamber of Commerce/Employers
- Health Care Providers
- Faith Community
- Youth Groups *(coming soon)*
EXAMPLES OF CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES:

- **Better Beverage Finder** – The Better Beverage Finder tool aims to help moms and dads search for beverage choices that any parent can love and shows how easy parents can find them in Howard County. This user-friendly tool features more than 300 beverage options that are both low in sugar and great for families and kids.

- **Howard County Public School System** – While the campaign’s public message is focused on sugary drinks, the Foundation has also taken advantage of opportunistic openings to improve policies related to healthy eating and active lifestyles. Since the fall of 2012, the Foundation has been working to improve the school wellness policy given that it was up for review. This spring, the school system agreed to make healthy food and drink choices the default in all student accessible vending machines (i.e., compliant with IOM nutritional standards), offer a healthy breakfast to all children in every school, and set a 30-minute minimum recess time for elementary school students.

- **Howard County Government** – In December 2012, the Howard County Executive issued an Order that set nutrition standards for food and drinks: (a) purchased by all county departments; (b) put in vending machines; and (c) served to residents in county programs. The campaign continues to work with county departments that work with families to ensure that healthy choices are being promoted.

- **Healthy Howard Childcare Program** – Via Healthy Howard (our grantee), the Foundation is providing child care centers and home day-cares assistance to promote breastfeeding, serve healthier drinks to their children, and increase physical activity. Last year, 50 child care facilities were certified as “Healthy Howard Childcare Facilities” and 74 will be certified this year.

- **Health Care Providers** – Working with our grantees, the American Academy of Pediatrics – MD Chapter and the Howard County Health Department, the Foundation is providing pediatricians tools to give consistent advice on sugary drink consumption and to properly diagnose and treat obesity in their practices. In the near future, the campaign will announce partnerships with dentists, nurses, dental hygienists, and other health care providers.

- **Employers** – The Howard County Chamber of Commerce and the Foundation are jointly sponsoring a study to assess the economic consequences of obesity in terms of employer health care cost, employee productivity, and employee absenteeism. Together, we will educate employers about how well designed wellness programs, policies, and health benefits can improve the bottom line and help make employees healthier and more productive.

- **Faith Community** – Via People Acting Together in Howard (PATH), a faith group of 16 area congregations, the coalition is reaching out to faith communities to help change purchasing policies, provide healthier drink options, and build support for other public policies.

WE NEED YOU!!

We are building a large and diverse Better Choices Coalition of leading community leaders and organizations. We need you and your favorite organization to join us! To join online, visit [http://www.hocounsweetened.org](http://www.hocounsweetened.org) and click “Join Coalition.”

Together, we can improve the health and wellness of the people that live or work in our community. We can increase the number of healthy food and drink choices available to all children and families and change community norms that will reduce childhood obesity.

For more information, call Glenn at the Horizon Foundation at 443-766-1217 or email him at gschneider@thehorizonfoundation.org