

GEORGE WARREN BROWN SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

# BACKGROUND

In 2005, the Missouri Foundation for Health (MFH) launched the Healthy & Active Communities (H&AC) Initiative to address rising obesity levels in Missouri. The Promising Strategies (PS) funding strategy of the H&AC Initiative requires projects to include a policy component (e.g., advocacy activities, policy implementation).

Addressing obesity prevention through policy change can lead to more sustainable effects than funding-dependent programmatic interventions.<sup>1</sup> However, practitioners and policymakers may fail to reach this potential by adopting policies that include few changes or use weak language. This study assessed worksite wellness policies implemented by PS projects on strength and comprehensiveness of policy language.

### **Research Question**

What are the characteristics of stronger and more comprehensive worksite policies that promote obesity prevention?

# METHODS

Policies implemented by PS projects were assessed using PolicyLift, a comprehensive, ready-made tool for assessing the language of obesity prevention policies based on the Community Healthy Living Index (CHLI).<sup>2,3</sup> The tool includes a slightly different set of indicators to be assessed for different policy environments (e.g., worksite, school, healthcare). However, this study used the tool to aggregate assessment scores across **25 worksite policies** to identify overall trends in strength and comprehensiveness of policy language within the worksite policy environment.

The assessment for the worksite environment included **6 domains** consisting of **30 indicators** related to healthy eating and physical activity in the workplace. Policies were assessed in two ways:

- Strength of language (e.g., weak, unenforceable language such as "encourage" vs. strong language that requires components be met)
- Policy comprehensiveness (e.g., number of indicators addressed, regardless of language)

http://policylift.wustl.edu

# Assessing the Quality of Obesity **Prevention Policies**

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# RESULTS

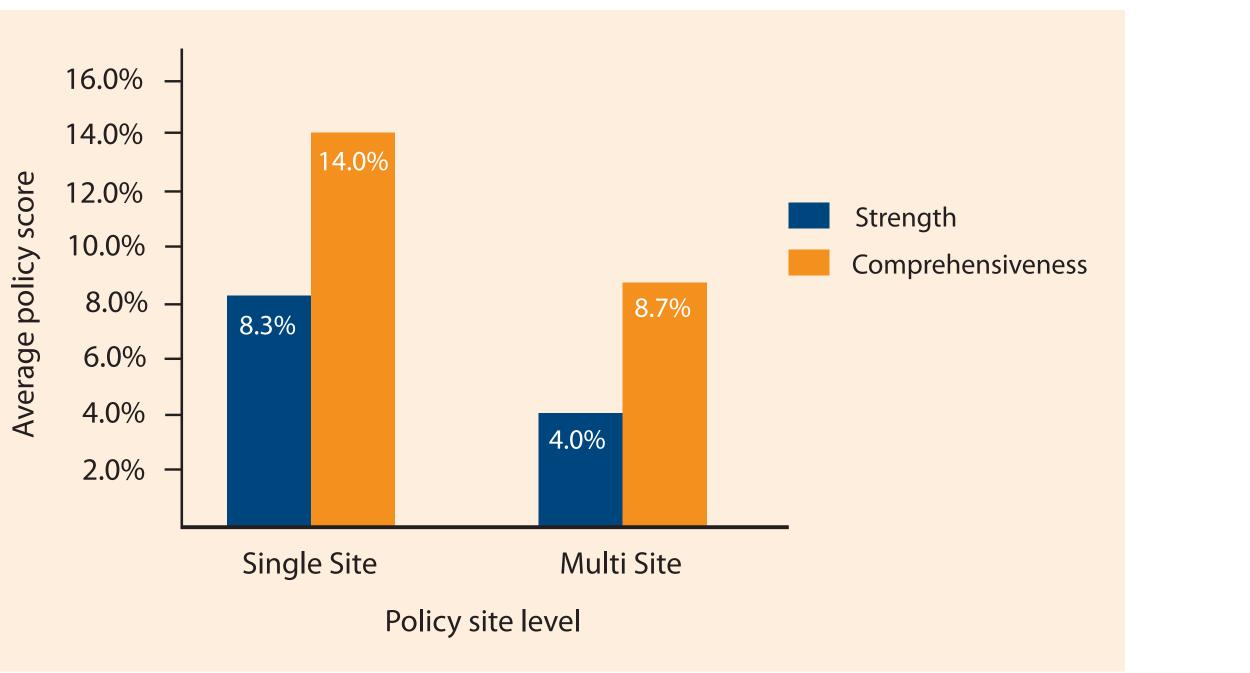
**Overall, worksite policies scored low in both** strength and comprehensiveness.

Policies averaged scores of 8% on strength and 13% on comprehensiveness out of a possible score of 100%.

Policies implemented at single worksites were stronger and more comprehensive than policies at multiple sites (e.g., multiple bank branches).

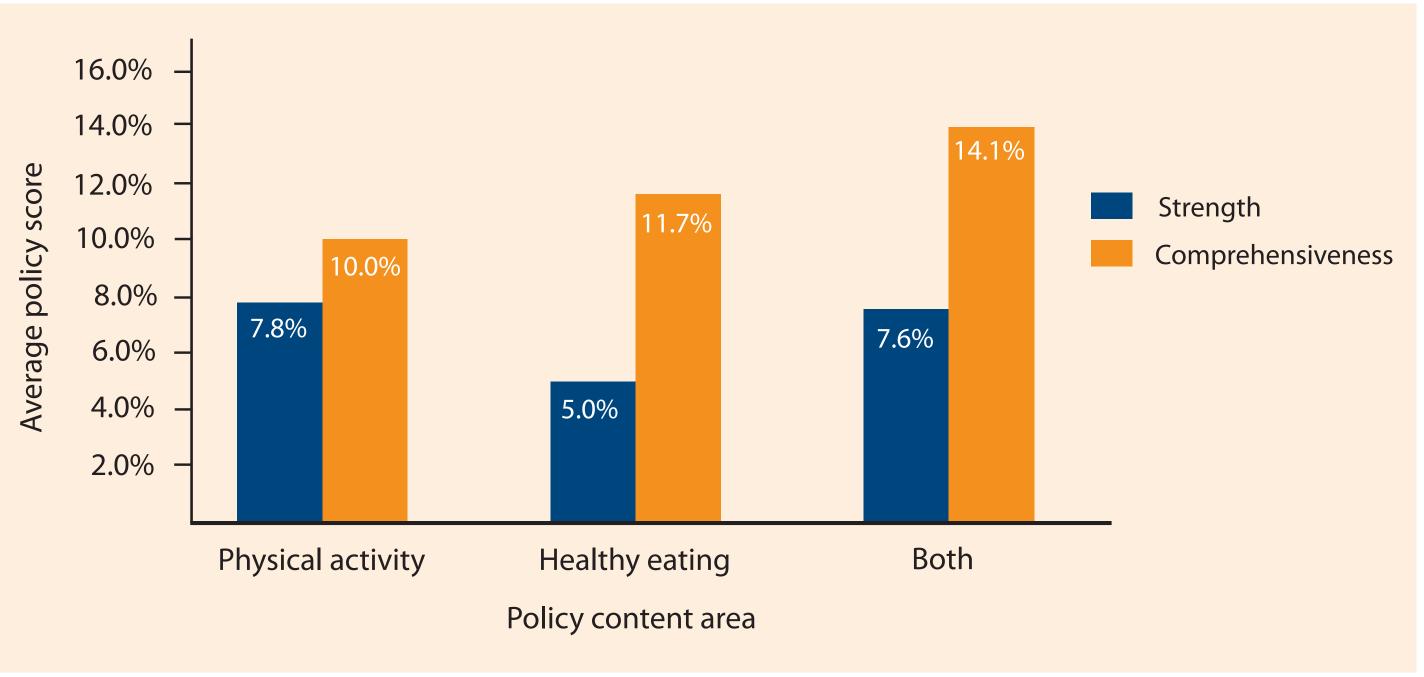
The highest scoring policies on strength and comprehensiveness were implemented at a single site.

**Policies with more components did not use stronger language.** Policies that included both physical activity and healthy eating content did not have higher strength scores than policies that included only one content area.



### Figure I: Policy Strength and Comprehensiveness by Site Level

### Figure 2: Policy Strength and Comprehensiveness by Content Area



## Washington University in St. Louis

**Strength score** Percentage of indicators addressed with strong language

AVG. SCORE: 8%

**Comprehensiveness score** Percentage of assessment indicators addressed by policy

AVG. SCORE:  $3^{\%}$ 

# CONCLUSIONS

- not ensure strong language.

# NEXT STEPS

The findings shared above are the preliminary results of policies implemented as part of ongoing PS projects. As policies continue to be implemented, the H&AC evaluation will:

- and other variables.

More research is needed on development of obesity prevention policies. Community organizations, worksites, and practitioners can:

- various settings.
- such as PolicyLift. comprehensive.

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> Despite certain types of policies scoring higher on strength and comprehensiveness than others, all policies have opportunities to improve on both measures.

> Development of policies that are to be implemented at multiple worksite locations may present a different set of challenges than policies to be implemented at a single site.

> Including more components (e.g., addressing physical activity *and* healthy eating) does

### **Assess policies as they are implemented in worksites and other** environments (e.g., school, healthcare).

Continued assessment of obesity prevention policies can inform if the trends identified here exist in other worksites and across different settings.

## **Examine relationships between strength and comprehensiveness of policies**

Policy strength and comprehensiveness may differ across other policy characteristics (e.g., rural vs. urban projects). Stronger and more comprehensive policies may also result in greater implementation of policy changes.

## Identify best practices for developing strong and comprehensive policies in

Best practices may vary depending on the site level (e.g., single site, multi site) or environment (e.g., worksite, school) where the policy is to be implemented.

## • Continue to assess the language of obesity prevention policies, using tools

Assessing policy language will help to identify areas for improvement in making obesity prevention policies stronger and more

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<sup>,</sup> R. C., Haire-Joshu, D., & Luke, D. A. (2006). Shaping the context of health: A review of environmental and policy approaches in the prevention of chronic diseases. Annual Review of Public Health, 27, 341-370.

<sup>8</sup> http://www.ymca.net/communityhealthylivingindex/