American Heart Association and Nemours Launch Healthy Eating and Food Access Initiative

Initiative on Healthy Eating and Food Access in Early Care and Education Programs, Pilot Program in St. Louis Expected to Reach 120 Early Care Centers

With funding provided by Monsanto Fund, the American Heart Association and Nemours Children's Health System (Nemours), are launching Healthy Food Alliance for Early Education, a technical assistance program for early care and education settings in St. Louis aimed at improving healthy eating and food access among children from birth to five years of age. The program provides direct, hands-on assistance, customized training, resources and tools to support healthy lifestyles in early care and education environments. Healthy Food Alliance for Early Education is underway with the program's childcare specialists currently recruiting early care and education programs for participation.

Components of the program include: identifying food access gaps and partnerships to support early care and education programs, developing and adopting a center wellness policy, providing training and technical assistance, engaging parents, and encouraging and recognizing progress towards best practices and policies for nutrition, physical activity, screen time and infant feeding. In addition, the program manager and childcare specialists will work to improve healthy food access at participating centers and in the communities they serve. This work is designed to collaborate with local organizations and enhance current initiatives in the community.

According to Child Care America, nearly 11 million children in the United States under the age of five spend at least part of their day in regular child care arrangements. These early care settings have become important components to ensuring children receive proper nutrition and physical activity. Introducing fruits, vegetables, whole grains and physical activity to children early in life may reduce the risk of cardiovascular diseases in adulthood.

"The American Heart Association is committed to helping all Americans lead heart-healthy lives and recognizes that helping children develop healthy habits today can lead to a healthier America in the future," said Dr. Michael Lim, volunteer Board President of the American Heart Association, St. Louis. "By working with early care centers throughout St. Louis, Healthy Food Alliance for Early Education will ensure healthy practices are implemented in these centers every day, with a special focus on proper nutrition. AHA is pleased to work with organizations like Nemours and Monsanto Fund to make a positive impact on children in St. Louis."

"Nemours is thrilled to bring Healthy Food Alliance for Early Education to St. Louis, where strong work to address childhood obesity and food insecurity is already underway," said Debbie Chang, Senior Vice President of Policy and Prevention for Nemours Children's Health System. "Through Healthy Food Alliance for Early Education, Nemours and the American Heart Association will collaborate with others working locally and at the state level to increase the number of early care and education providers who receive customized support and resources on how to make best practices in healthy eating and physical activity a part of everyday life for the children and parents they serve. We are eager to launch the program, expanding the number of children in St. Louis living, learning and playing in healthier environments."

"Monsanto Fund's support for this program extends beyond the farm as we work with dietitians, non-profits and others in the food supply chain to increase the availability, access and consumption of a variety of protein sources, fruits and vegetables," said Al Mitchell, President, Monsanto Fund and Vice President of Community Relations for the company. "Teaming with the technical expertise of the American Heart Association and Nemours will help us better understand how to encourage healthy diets among consumers, identify obstacles to healthy eating and provide assistance to children and families who need help."

For more information on Healthy Food Alliance for Early Education, Healthy Way to Grow and availability in your community, please visit www.healthywaytogrow.org.

Nemours is an internationally recognized children's health system that owns and operates the Nemours/Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children in Wilmington, Del., and Nemours Children's Hospital in Orlando, Fla., along with outpatient facilities in six states, delivering pediatric primary, specialty and urgent care. Nemours also powers the world's most-visited website for information on the health of children and teens, KidsHealth.org and offers on-demand, online video patient visits through Nemours CareConnect.

Established as The Nemours Foundation through the legacy and philanthropy of Alfred I. duPont, Nemours provides pediatric clinical care, research, education, advocacy, and prevention programs to families in the communities it serves.

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