



Advancing Healthy Lifestyles Coalition Policy Committee

A Comparative Analysis of State-Level Physical Activity, Nutrition, and Obesity Prevention (PANO) Programs

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By Esther Dawley, MPH

Executive Summary

This report highlights findings from a comparative analysis of state-level public health programs focused on nutrition and physical activity across Iowa, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware. The goal was to identify effective strategies and funding models that could inform and strengthen Delaware's Advancing Healthy Lifestyles (AHL) initiative. Each state brings unique approaches to public health programming, ranging from school wellness and early childhood obesity prevention to community grants and public-private partnerships. This report summarizes key lessons and offers practical recommendations for tailoring these models to fit Delaware's diverse communities.

Introduction

Delaware's AHL Coalition is working to improve nutrition and physical activity across the state. To help strengthen its strategies, this report looks at what similar states are doing to tackle public health challenges. By comparing efforts across five states, we can highlight ideas that have worked elsewhere and could be adapted here in Delaware.

Methodology

Over six weeks, a comprehensive review on public websites, program documents, and reports for Iowa, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware was completed. Data was collected on policies, funding, program focus, and target audiences. Key themes and lessons were identified through a side-by-side comparison.

State-by-State Findings

Iowa

Iowa focuses on rural outreach and uses tools like the 5-2-1-0 Healthy Choices Count! program. This initiative supports policy and environmental changes in schools and communities. Iowa also promotes interactive classroom tools like the Move for Thought Kit.

Maryland

Maryland supports healthy food access through initiatives like the Fresh Food Financing Initiative and mobile markets. It also expands school meal programs and integrates technology into nutrition education. Public-private partnerships are strong, especially in urban centers like Baltimore.

New Jersey

New Jersey focuses on urban health challenges with initiatives like SNAP-Ed and Safe Routes to School. Programs support both nutrition and physical activity and engage schools, families, and communities through hands-on education and innovation grants.

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania emphasizes early childhood education and hospital-based nutrition programs. Efforts like Keystone Kids Go and Good Food Healthy Hospitals highlight partnerships with schools and healthcare systems to promote wellness from early ages.

Delaware

Delaware's AHL Initiative provides mini-grants to community organizations and has launched programs in schools, workplaces, and underserved areas. The state also supports mobile health and wellness services through programs like HEALTH for All.

Common Themes Across States

- Schools are a key intervention point across all states
- Programs often blend nutrition education with physical activity
- Federal funding (CDC, USDA, ARPA) is a major resource
- Public-private partnerships enhance reach and sustainability
- States are tailoring programs to urban or rural needs

Challenges Noted

- Funding instability due to reliance on federal dollars
- Gaps in coordination between nutrition and activity programs
- Access barriers in both rural and urban settings

What Delaware Can Learn

- Customize programs for different populations (urban, rural, suburban)
- Invest in early childhood obesity prevention like Pennsylvania's ECE efforts
- Expand interactive learning tools to increase youth engagement
- Strengthen local coalitions and regional partnerships
- Continue building sustainable funding by layering public and private sources

Recommendations for the AHL Coalition

1. Explore adding programs like 5-2-1-0 or Move for Thought to Delaware schools
2. Strengthen evaluation practices to measure outcomes more effectively
3. Support regional grant applications with nearby states
4. Expand the Healthy Schools Recognition Program
5. Increase visibility of AHL work with community storytelling and data sharing

Conclusion

By learning from the experiences of peer states, Delaware's AHL Coalition is well-positioned to lead the way in community-focused public health. This comparative analysis offers both inspiration and a practical roadmap for next steps.

Introduction

This comparative Analysis of state-level Physical Activity, Nutrition, and Obesity Prevention (PANO) Programs was a student led research project by the author, Esther Dawley, under the supervision of the Advancing Healthy Lifestyles Coalition Policy Committee. This effort, which was conducted over several weeks and completed in May 2025, examines five comparison states (Iowa, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware) and identifies common themes and key take-aways. The paper is organized as follows:

- Overview of Programs in Other States
- Similarities in PANO Strategies
- List of Common Themes
- Lessons for Delaware
- Unique Programs
- Funding Sources for PANO Programs:
- Key Takeaways Across States

Overview of Programs in Other States

Iowa:

- <https://educate.iowa.gov/pk-12/operation-support/nutrition-programs>
- <https://educate.iowa.gov/pk-12/operation-support/nutrition-programs/team-nutrition>
- https://www.iowahungersummit.org/en/the_iowa_hunger_directory/organizations_fighting_hunger/?action=detail&memberID=51957&
- <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/humansciences/buy-eat-live-healthy>

Maryland:

- <https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/ccdpc/Reports/Documents/Maryland%20Nutrition%20and%20Physical%20Activity%20Plan%202006-2016.pdf>
- <https://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/SchoolandCommunityNutrition/Pages/default.aspx>
- <https://nfsc.umd.edu/extension/expanded-food-nutrition-education-program-efnep/>

New Jersey:

- <https://www.nj.gov/health/nutrition/services-support/schools/schools.shtml>
- <https://passaic.njaes.rutgers.edu/efnep/>

Pennsylvania:

- <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/health/programs/healthy-living/span.html>
- <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/education/programs-and-services/schools/food-and-nutrition/programs/nutrition-education-program.html>

- <https://www.projectpa.org>
- <https://www.panen.org>

Delaware:

- <https://dhss.delaware.gov/dph/dpc/panohome.html>
- <https://www.healthylifestyle.org/Community-Partners/Advancing-Healthy-Lifestyles/Advancing-Healthy-Lifestyles-Coalition>

Similarities in PANO Strategies:

State	Key Policies and Initiatives	Funding Mechanisms	Target Audience	Focus Area
Iowa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Afterschool Program Snacks • Child & Adult Care Food Program • Civil Rights & Child Nutrition Programs • Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Program • Nutrition Learning Tools • School Meals • School Wellness • Special Milk Program • Summer Food Service Program • Team Nutrition • USDA Food Distribution • Move for Thought Kit • Stories in Motion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal Grants (USDA, SNAP-Ed) • State funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low-income families • Rural Populations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition • Physical Activity
Maryland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10-Year Nutrition and Physical Activity • EFNEP • School Meal Expansion • School and Community Lunch Program • National School Lunch Program • Child and Adult Care Food Program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal (USDA, EFNEP) • State funding • State general fund 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth and adults • Urban and suburban areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy school meals • Obesity prevention

New Jersey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WIC • School Health Strategies • Nutrition • Physical Activity • Health Corps • SNAP-Ed • New Jersey Safe Routes to school • EFNEP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Health • Federal Programs • State funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban areas (Passaic County) • Low-income families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School wellness • Urban Access
Pennsylvania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program • Good Food • Healthy Hospitals • Early Care and Education (ECE) • High-Impact Obesity Prevention Standards Integration • Keystone Kids Go 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State funding • USDA • Penn State-University Partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School-aged youth • Low-income individuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition • Early youth fitness
Delaware	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PANO • Advancing Healthy Lifestyles Coalition • School Health Initiatives • SNAP • WIC • Diabetes Coalition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State funding • Federal funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban • Suburban • Rural 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obesity • Prevention • Equitable

List of Common Themes:

Challenges

- Urban vs. Rural Disparities:
 - Rural communities face limited access to recreation facilities, fresh foods, and healthcare.
 - Urban areas deal with limited outdoor spaces and the abundance of fast food.
- Funding:
 - There is a heavy reliance on federal funding making programs vulnerable to policy shifts and budget cuts.
- Coordination:
 - Discussion between nutrition and physical activity programs seem to be limited.

Strengths

- WIC, EFNEP, SNAP-Ed, and CACFP are consistently integrated into statewide approaches.
- Schools serve as primary intervention points.
- States are building community partnerships (working with universities) and local coalitions.

Lessons for Delaware:

- **Tailoring Programs to the Needs of the Population**
 - New Jersey has tailored its program to meet the needs of urban populations, focusing on initiatives in food deserts and communities with high obesity rates. This is completed through a school wellness focused approach.
 - Iowa has tailored its program to meet the needs of a more rural demographic. This is completed through USDA and food programs.
 - Since Delaware contains urban, suburban and rural areas, it is important that programs are designed to meet the needs of specific populations.
- **Holistic Community-Based Approaches**
 - Programs like Stories in Motion and Move for Thought Kit aim to combine physical activity with fun, interactive learning methods, inspiring kids to develop positive attitudes toward health and wellness in children. (Iowa)
 - New Jersey uses School Health Strategies programs to focus on comprehensive health education, reaching families and schools.
 - Delaware can create more community-based health initiatives that combine education, physical activity and nutrition support. Delaware could incorporate interactive learning tools like Stories in Motion or Move for Thought to increase youth engagement.
- **Early Childhood Education and Obesity Prevention**
 - Pennsylvania: Programs such as Early Care and Education (ECE) and the Keystone Kids Go initiative focus on early childhood obesity prevention.
 - In Delaware's early childhood settings, early childhood obesity prevention programs, such as Keystone Kids Go-like programs can be implemented.

Unique Programs:

Iowa:

- 5-2-1-0 Healthy Choices Count! — a public-private partnership — cultivates healthy places for Iowa children and families using evidence-based healthy eating and active living approaches.
 - Iowa HHS provides funding and technical assistance to work with multi-sector community coalitions to make sustainable and equitable environmental and policy changes around 5-2-1-0 evidence-based strategies.
 - Funding for 5-2-1-0 Communities comes from the State of Iowa legislative budget allocated for childhood obesity prevention. Funding is provided in a three-year tiered allocation, first-year communities receiving \$30,000, second-year communities \$15,000, and third-year communities \$8,000.

- <https://hhs.iowa.gov/programs/programs-and-services/healthy-eating-active-living/5-2-1-0#:~:text=Funding%20for%205%2D2%2D1,and%20third%2Dyear%20communities%20%248%2C000.>
- Schools may claim reimbursement for one snack per child, per day. If the site is located in an area served by a school in which at least 50% of the enrolled children are eligible for free or reduced-price meals, all children are eligible to receive reimbursement for snacks at the free rate. Sites located in other areas must count meals and claim reimbursement by eligibility type of the child (free, reduced-price and paid) and have documentation of eligibility. No more than \$0.15 may be charged for a reduced-price snack. In order to be reimbursed, the snacks must contain at least two different components of the following four: a serving of fluid milk; a serving of meat or meat alternate; a serving of vegetable(s) or fruits(s) or juice; a serving of whole grain or enriched bread and/or cereal.
 - <https://educate.iowa.gov/pk-12/operation-support/nutrition-programs/afterschool-programs#:~:text=Schools%20may%20claim%20reimbursement%20for,snacks%20at%20the%20free%20rate.>
- Move for Thought Kit
 - The "Move for Thought" Kit can be used to assist in meeting your Healthy Kids Act physical activity minutes and your Healthier US School Challenge physical education minutes (if planned in partnership with the physical education teacher). The "Move for Thought" kit was not developed as a replacement for physical education. It was designed to help children increase their physical activity levels during the school day, as well as to help teachers facilitate learning and academic achievement. All activities were developed with the goal of being easy and safe to apply in a classroom with limited space, equipment, and preparation time. All activities were developed to be integrated with the content of ANY subject area. The teacher will only need to prepare the academic content that will be used for each activity, e.g., on flashcards, a whiteboard, or clipboards. Modification of the activities to fit the teacher's needs is encouraged.
 - <https://educate.iowa.gov/media/1176/download?inline>
- Stories in Motion
 - Short stories that include action words which prompt physical activity! Utilize these stories in the classroom or childcare setting for short brain breaks. Developed by Iowa Team Nutrition.
- Iowa Fresh App
 - The "Iowa Fresh" app helps users learn about healthy eating, find community resources, and access information about getting fresh produce. It allows users to watch videos, answer questions, and potentially earn prescriptions for healthy

food. The app also provides resources for cooking with seasonal vegetables and finding local resources.

- <https://portal.nifa.usda.gov/web/crisprojectpages/1029432-iowa-produce-prescription-program-improving-the-health-status-of-iowans-facing-nutrition-insecurity.html>

Maryland:

- Fresh Food Financing Initiative
 - Through, House Bill 451, the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development has the authority to invest in partners who can demonstrate the ability to recruit, capitalize and support the development of a pipeline of food-related enterprises located in underserved communities within designated Food Desert Areas and Sustainable Communities. Selected community-based lending intermediaries will originate and administer such loans as well as provide their applicants with technical assistance.
 - An application is required to become an Intermediary. Eligible applicants are entities that are currently working in Maryland communities and are either a Community Development Financial Institution, local governments or quasi-public agency. Priority will be given to those applicants focused on jurisdictions that have food desert initiatives underway.
 - <https://dhcd.maryland.gov/Communities/Pages/freshfood/default.aspx>
- Maryland supports programs like EFNEP and School Meal Expansion, which provide nutritious meals and nutrition education to students.
 - <https://extension.umd.edu/programs/family-consumer-sciences/efnep/efnep-youth/>
- Technology is integrated into the nutrition education classes to enhance learning strategies using interactive technologies such as videos, quizzes, Jeopardy games and interactive Google searches.
 - <https://extension.umd.edu/programs/family-consumer-sciences/efnep/efnep-youth/>
- In Baltimore City, the University of Maryland Medical Center (UMMC) has partnered with Hungry Harvest for "Mobile Markets" providing fresh food strategically located in areas with food deserts; more than 2,600 bags of low-cost fresh produce have been sold. UMMC also hosts weekly Farmer's Markets in a park across the street from the hospital's downtown campus. Throughout COVID, the hospital has partnered with food companies and non-profit organizations to distribute close to 40,000 boxes of food, fresh produce and prepackaged lunches, filling an especially urgent need in the immediate wake of the pandemic, when schools shut down and food stores could not keep up with demand.
 - <https://www.umms.org/news/news-releases/2021/commitment-to-address-food-insecurity>

New Jersey:

- New Jersey's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - Education (SNAP-Ed) is a federally funded nutrition and physical activity program. It provides information and hands-on workshops to encourage people of all ages to make healthy food choices on a limited budget and lead more active lives.
 - SNAP-Ed offers free workshops where you live, work and play. Learn how to:
 - Prepare nutritious meals and snacks
 - Shop for healthy items on a budget
 - Understand food labels, ingredients and food safety
 - Limit sugar, fats and salt
 - Make physical activity part of your lifestyle
 - <https://www.nj.gov/humanservices/njsnap/njsnap-ed/home/>
- New Jersey Safe Routes to School (SRTS), which is created and supported by the New Jersey Department of Transportation with funding from the Federal Highway Administration, enables and encourages safer and more accessible walking and bicycling environments for children in New Jersey through education, training, and research. Safe Routes to School projects can involve physical improvements to the environment, as well as encouragement programs to promote more walking and bicycling to and from school.
 - [https://vtc.rutgers.edu/new-jersey-safe-routes-to-school-srts/#:~:text=New%20Jersey%20Safe%20Routes%20to%20School%20\(SRTS\)%2C%20which%20is,Jersey%20through%20education%2C%20training%2C%20and](https://vtc.rutgers.edu/new-jersey-safe-routes-to-school-srts/#:~:text=New%20Jersey%20Safe%20Routes%20to%20School%20(SRTS)%2C%20which%20is,Jersey%20through%20education%2C%20training%2C%20and)
- Thanks to a generous grant from the NJEA Frederick L. Hipp Foundation for Excellence in Education, Washington Township elementary schools in Long Valley transformed their health and physical education program through the Heart SMART I & II initiative. The innovative program, designed by a team of dedicated health and physical education teachers, equips students with heart rate monitors and pedometers. By using these tools, students can track their fitness levels and gain a deeper understanding of their cardiovascular health.
 - <https://www.njea.org/a-game-changer-for-physical-education/>
- TRENTON, N.J. (January 16, 2025) – Last month, the [New Jersey Economic Development Authority](#) (NJEDA) Board approved the creation of the [Food Equity and Economic Development in New Jersey \(FEED NJ\) Pilot Program](#), a \$30 million competitive grant program that will support food security projects in New Jersey's Food Desert Communities (FDCs). Building on the success of the NJEDA's Atlantic City Food Security Grants Pilot Program, FEED NJ will award grants of up to \$500,000 to for-profit and nonprofit entities working to improve residents' ability to access fresh, affordable, and healthy food.
 - <https://www.njeda.gov/njeda-board-approves-30-million-program-to-strengthen-food-security-and-access-in-nj-food-desert-communities/>

Pennsylvania:

- Good Food Healthy Hospitals
 - The department partners with the Philadelphia Department of Public Health and The Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania to implement the Good Food, Healthy Hospitals, an innovative program to improve health through interventions in hospital food and better nutrition. Currently, 64 hospitals, 16 health systems, serving 28 counties participate in the program.
 - Participating hospitals and health systems:
 - Receive technical assistance on nutritional analysis, menu planning and implementing food service guidelines;
 - Adopt food service guidelines to create healthier food environments;
 - Pledge to increase the availability of healthy foods in cafeterias, vending, catering, patient meals and purchased foods; and
 - Convene as a task force twice a year to collaborate and share with other participating hospitals.
- Project PA, a collaboration between Penn State University's Department of Nutritional Sciences and the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Division of Food and Nutrition, partners with schools and their communities to provide sound nutrition education and to promote children's healthy eating behaviors.

Delaware:

- Mini-Grant Awards:
 - The Division of Public Health's (DPH) Physical Activity, Nutrition, and Obesity Prevention (PANO) program is pleased to announce that it has awarded 10 mini-grants to community partners under the Advancing Healthy Lifestyles (AHL) Initiative. The purpose of the mini-grant program is to support Delaware community partner organizations with projects that improve community health and reduce chronic disease through policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) approaches, using a health-equity lens. Partners include: Boys & Girls Clubs of Delaware, ChristianaCare, Delaware Breast Cancer Coalition, Delaware State University, Inner-City Cultural League, Lutheran Community Services, La Red Health Center, Mid-County Center, and W.B. Simpson Elementary School.
 - <https://www.healthydelaware.org/Community-Partners/Advancing-Healthy-Lifestyles/Mini-Grant-Awards#intro>
- To improve the health and wellness of school-age students in Delaware, AHL has launched the Healthy Schools Recognition Program, which aims to recognize Delaware schools that are implementing policy, systems, and environmental change strategies and programs to improve the health and well-being of their students, with a focus on improved nutrition and increased physical activity.
 - <https://www.healthydelaware.org/Community-Partners/Advancing-Healthy-Lifestyles/School-Health-And-Wellness#intro>

- The Worksite Wellness Initiative is a program designed to assist Delaware’s employers in advancing workforce health and the well-being of their employees. We do this by assessing employers’ current health and well-being strategies, and helping them develop and implement new plans to achieve a healthier workforce. Chronic illness and mental health conditions account for about 90% of the national annual health care expenditure, with employer health plans bearing a significant percentage of that cost. Our program can help mitigate increasing health care costs, among other benefits.
 - <https://www.healthydelaware.org/Community-Partners/Advancing-Healthy-Lifestyles/Workplace-Wellness#intro>
- HEALTH for All is a collaborative partnership between the University of Delaware with the support of Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield and the Laffey McHugh Foundation.
 - Through mobile services and outreach in Wilmington and New Castle County, HEALTH for All promotes healthy living choices and wellness while providing hands-on experience for undergraduate and graduate students. Site activities include, but are not limited to, physical and behavioral health screenings and education.
 - <https://sites.udel.edu/healthycommunities/healthforall/>

Funding Sources for PANO Programs:

- Federal Grants
 - CDC Grants
 - American Rescue Plan Act Funding
- State Budgets
- Private Funding

State	Federal Grants	State Budget Allocations	Private Funding Sources
Delaware	CDC Grants, ARPA funds	Allocated through DHSS	Partnerships with local nonprofits
Maryland	CDC Grants, ARPA funds	Allocated through DHSS	Collaborations with private entities
New Jersey	CDC Grants, ARPA funds	Allocated through DCA	Partnerships with private sector
Pennsylvania	CDC Grants, ARPA funds	Allocated through DHSS	Collaborations with private entities
Iowa	CDC Grants, ARPA funds	Allocated through IDPH	Collaborations with private entities

Potential Funding Opportunities for Delaware:

- Delaware can apply for additional CDC grants and ARPA funds designated for health initiatives.
- Delaware could create a state-specific fund to support nonprofits engaged in PANO activities (similar to Pennsylvania's Nonprofit Security Grant Fund).
- Strengthening Public-Private Partnerships
- Partnering with neighboring states on regional health initiatives (could lead to joint funding opportunities and shared resources).

Week 6:

- **Iowa: 5-2-1-0 Healthy Choices Count!**
 - 5 servings of fruits and vegetables, 2 hours or less of recreational screen time, 1 hour or more of physical activity, 0 sugary drinks
 - Evaluation Findings:
 - The program has been implemented in schools, childcare centers, and healthcare settings, emphasizing policy and environmental changes to support healthy behaviors. An evaluation report highlighted the program's success in increasing awareness and adoption of healthy habits among children and families.
- **Maryland: Nutrition and Physical Activity State Plan**
 - Maryland's Nutrition and Physical Activity State Plan (2006-2016) aimed obesity and chronic disease through:
 - Promoting healthy eating and physical activity
 - Implementing community-based interventions
 - Enhancing surveillance and evaluation efforts
- **New Jersey: ShapingNJ and NAP SACC**
 - An evaluation of the NAP SACC program indicated improvements in childcare centers' nutrition and physical activity practices, including:
 - Enhanced policies limiting unhealthy foods and drinks
 - Increased opportunities for physical activity
 - Sustained changes in center environments supporting healthy
- **Pennsylvania: State Physical Activity and Nutrition (SPAN) Program**
 - Community-level interventions promoting healthy eating and active living.
 - Partnerships with schools and local organizations.
 - Data collection to monitor progress and inform policy decisions.
- **Delaware: Advancing Healthy Lifestyles (AHL) Initiative**
 - Access and Affordability
 - Collaborative Stakeholder Engagement
 - PANO Elevation

Key Takeaways Across States:

- Implementing policies that create supportive environments for healthy behaviors is crucial.
- Collaborations with local organizations enhance program reach and sustainability.
- Targeting early care settings can establish healthy habits from a young age.
- Collecting and analyzing data informs program improvements and policy.

Summary Matrix:

Criteria	Iowa	Maryland	New Jersey	Pennsylvania	Delaware
Funding	CDC Grants, ARPA funds, allocated through IDPH, collaborations with private entities	CDC Grants, ARPA funds, allocated through DHSS, collaborations with private entities	CDC Grants, ARPA funds, allocated through DCA, partnerships with private sector	CDC Grants, ARPA funds, allocated through DHSS, collaborations with private entities	CDC Grants, ARPA funds, partnerships with local nonprofits, DHSS
Innovation	5-2-1-0 Healthy Choices Count!	Nutrition and Physical Activity State Plan	ShapingNJ and NAP SACC	State Physical Activity and Nutrition (SPAN) Program	Advancing Healthy Lifestyles (AHL) Initiative
Effectiveness	Success in increasing awareness and adoption of healthy habits among children and families.	Positives outcomes in the community	Community-based interventions were successful	High program engagement	Strong coordination with schools and community partnerships