



## Background

### The Root Of The Problem

#### Why Fruits and Vegetables Are Important:

- Fruits and vegetables are the powerhouse of nutrition.
- Increasing the amount of fruits and vegetables consumed improves nutrition. It can positively impact the epidemic of overweight and obesity. Fruits and vegetables decrease the risk of cancer and other chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes.
- During the past two decades, the percentage of children who are overweight has nearly doubled, and the percentage of adolescents who are overweight has almost tripled in the U.S. Furthermore, research trends show that overweight and obese children tend to become overweight and obese adults.
- There is a huge economic burden created from overweight and obesity. For youth in the U.S., the annual hospital costs associated with obesity have increased from \$35 million in 1979–1981 to \$127 million in 1997–1999. In 2000, the total indirect cost of obesity was estimated to be \$56 billion.
- People who eat more servings of fruit each day weigh less than those who eat less amounts of fruit. Excess calorie intake plays a big part in the obesity epidemic. Children who drink the highest amounts of sweetened beverages also consume more French fries and eat fewer fruits.
- Seventy-one percent of Maine adults and 77% of Maine high school students do not eat the recommended five servings of fruits and vegetables each day.
- Many Mainers report lack of access, lack of education (how to choose, store, and prepare), and cost as being major barriers to fruit and vegetable consumption.

#### Considerations for Your Community

- Policy and environmental changes for nutrition and physical activity make it easier for everyone to choose healthier dietary options like fruits and vegetables.
- Utilizing local farms and locally grown produce will help the overall health of Maine people, as well as improve the economic health of local and State agriculture.
- Using and promoting local produce increases accessibility to and education for fruit and vegetable consumption.
- Teaching people how to buy, prepare, and eat fruits and vegetables helps promote the consumption of produce.

*References available on Fact Sheets in Presentation Materials Section.*