Illinois’ Obesity Epidemic: A Big Fat Problem

Illinois’ obesity epidemic threatens to overwhelm our healthcare system, cause huge increases in debilitating chronic disease and undermine our economy. For example:

- In 1995, Illinois had an obesity rate of 15.3%. Fast forward fifteen years, and the obesity rate in Illinois has nearly doubled.

- Ten years ago, not a single state had an obesity rate above 24%. Today, 43 states have obesity rates that surpass even the highest rate of obesity from 2000. Currently, the state with the lowest rate of obesity would have been the highest rated in 1995.

- A 2005 report in the New England Journal of Medicine startled the nation with its prediction that the current generation of American children will have a shorter lifespan than their parents' generation -- due largely to obesity-related disease.

- A recent report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that found that approximately two-thirds of U.S. adults and one-fifth of U.S. children are obese or overweight.

- This is also an issue of health disparities. According to the CDC, African Americans have a 51% higher prevalence of obesity, and Hispanics have 21% higher obesity prevalence compared with whites.

- A 2007 national survey on children's health revealed that only three states (Mississippi, Georgia, and Kentucky) have a higher childhood obesity rate than Illinois. These alarming statistics suggest that Illinois kids are at excessive risk for serious lifelong health problems like diabetes, heart disease, fatty liver disease, and arthritis.

- A growing body of research indicates that obesity is largely to blame for our ballooning health care costs. Nationally, 75% of all healthcare costs are spent on the treatment of chronic diseases, many of which are obesity-related.

- Obesity is a rapidly escalating problem that costs the Illinois health care system and taxpayers nearly $3.4 billion per year -- including more than $1 billion to Medicaid and $800 million to Medicare annually.

- Some experts predict that the annual cost of obesity to the Illinois health care system will increase to $14 billion or more a year by 2018.