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**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Releases Latest *Issue Brief*:  
*Preventing Childhood Obesity in Rhode Island***

*In the 2004-2005 school year, one in five (20.3%) children entering kindergarten was obese. Overweight and obese children are at high risk for health problems throughout childhood and into adulthood.*

PROVIDENCE, RI, May 24, 2006 – Rhode Island KIDS COUNT will release its latest *Issue Brief* entitled *Preventing Childhood Obesity in Rhode Island* at a policy forum with service providers, state agencies, advocates, and political and community leaders to be held at **Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, One Union Station, Providence, RI from 10:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. on Wednesday, May 24<sup>th</sup>**. This Rhode Island KIDS COUNT *Issue Brief* was made possible through the support of UnitedHealthcare and CVS/pharmacy. Patrice Cooper, Executive Director of UnitedHealthcare's Medicaid program, opened the meeting, stating, "UnitedHealthcare is pleased to have supported Kids Count on the *Preventing Childhood Obesity Issue Brief*. We realize that pediatric obesity is a significant problem among our community and know it is important that stakeholders come together to review information and make recommendations that could provide comprehensive, multi-faceted solutions to this growing epidemic."

The *Issue Brief* was released before an audience of policymakers and community leaders who are working to prevent childhood obesity before it begins, through a variety of strategies that focus on healthy eating and nutrition, physical activity and the family, school, child care and community environment.

**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT**

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Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, opened the meeting stating, "The epidemic of childhood obesity that is occurring across the nation is evident among Rhode Island children and youth. Prevention and treatment is critical if we are to have healthy, fit children and avoid dramatic escalations in obesity-related health care costs in the decades ahead."

According to the 2003 National Survey of Children's Health, 27% of Rhode Island children ages 10-17 were either overweight (15%) or obese (12%). The likelihood that overweight in childhood will persist into adulthood increases with the child's age, the severity of the condition, and the presence of obesity in at least one parent.

In the 2004-2005 school year, one in five (20.3%) children entering kindergarten was obese. Being overweight during childhood can have lifetime impacts on physical and mental health. Children who are overweight or obese are more likely to have health problems during childhood and as adults, including type II diabetes, asthma, sleep apnea, hypertension, heart disease and other acute and chronic health problems. Sixty percent of obese children ages 5 to 10 years old already have at least one cardiovascular disease risk factor. Overweight adolescents have a 70% chance of becoming overweight or obese adults, who have increased health risks and higher health care costs than those at a healthy weight.

Dr. David Gifford, MD, MPH, Director of the Rhode Island Department of Health has declared childhood obesity to be one of his highest priorities. He welcomed the group with a call to action, "In Rhode Island more than one in four children under age 18 is overweight or obese. Due to the epidemic of childhood obesity, young people today may live less healthy and shorter lives than their parents. The Department of Health and our community partners are engaging in strategies to ensure that children have access to healthy foods, learn healthy eating behaviors, and participate in regular physical activity. These strategies are key to preventing childhood obesity."

The policy roundtable presented the causes of childhood obesity and focused on prevention strategies, including the role of families, the health care system, communities, schools and child care programs. Public policy strategies include limiting the availability of soda and junk food in schools, increasing the availability of healthy foods in schools and increasing physical activity during the school day through increased time on active physical education and providing recess for elementary school children.

Dr. Linda Shalon, a physician at Hasbro Children's Hospital noted, "The main culprits are eating too much and moving too little. Parents and guardians should model healthy eating and limit their children's television viewing and recreational screen time (video games, computers and the Internet) in favor of

unstructured play and physical activity. There is a direct association between these sedentary activities and the increase in childhood obesity. A healthful diet and physical activity needs to be supported by the most important environments in our children's lives, including the family, schools, child care centers and after school programs, the community and the health care system."

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children's policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, education, safety and development of Rhode Island's children. This *Issue Brief* is supported through grants from UnitedHealthcare and CVS/pharmacy.