



St. Paul School students enjoy a fun round of the parachute game at a Healthy Habits Fit Heart event. Image reproduced with permission from Cedar Sinai Medical Center's Healthy Habits Program.

**To learn more about community health needs assessments and their implementation visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/policy/chna/>**

## Community Benefit: Encouraging Healthy Habits Early

**CDC supports making the healthy choice the easy choice in key community settings.**

### **IN THIS ISSUE...**

*Read how Cedars-Sinai Medical Center improved the health of its neighboring community by leveraging partnerships, using a community health needs assessment, and directing community benefit efforts in the community to address healthy habits and childhood obesity.*

## Collaboration leads to Healthy Habits in Schools

Cedars-Sinai Medical Center has developed the Healthy Habits program, a successful community-clinical linkage model to help underserved residents in nearby communities adopt healthier lifestyles. Cedars-Sinai partners with Los Angeles schools to reach children early in life and engages parents and teachers in promoting healthy eating and physical activity.

Cedars-Sinai began developing Healthy Habits as a successful response to requirements for nonprofit hospitals to conduct community health needs assessments (CHNA) and developing an implementation strategy that addresses the needs identified through the CHNA. For its CHNA, Cedars-Sinai included local, regional and national data on access to care and behavioral data of nutrition and physical activity. Using CHNA data to guide its community benefit strategy and programs, Cedars-Sinai built on established partnerships with local schools in vulnerable communities to develop a school-based obesity prevention intervention. The Healthy Habits curriculum, first launched in 2004 as a 10-week curriculum for 2<sup>nd</sup> graders, drew on expertise from various Cedars-Sinai departments, ranging from nutrition to pediatrics. The implementation plan focused on building partnerships with schools in a targeted geographic area.

Now a signature Community Benefit program for Cedars-Sinai, Healthy Habits is a comprehensive healthy eating and physical activity education program targeting a range of audiences at more than 30 community sites, including 16 elementary schools. In addition to the core 2<sup>nd</sup> grade curriculum, Healthy Habits includes refresher courses for 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and middle school students, and providing extensive resources and training for teachers. For parents, key components include building parent capacity as local leaders, facilitating parent-school communication, and strengthening community links, for example with local businesses, the fire department, police station and neighborhood council.

During 2012-2013, Healthy Habits reached over 3,000 students in over 100 classrooms, totaling 25,800 encounters. An evaluation by an independent consultant showed a measureable positive impact on participants: students made healthier food choices, parents modeled healthier behaviors and teachers promoted healthier classrooms. This success is attributed to a strategy focused on consistent messaging for all audiences. Carolyn Buenaflor, Associate Director of Healthy Habits, explains: "What we teach elementary and middle school students, we reinforce with parents and teachers. The consistent messages to multiple audiences are successful because of their layering effect, which maximizes the impact."

Dedicated staff and strong partnerships are crucial for this success. The nine-member Healthy Habits health education team includes fitness and nutrition experts, and certified health education specialists. In addition to partnering with schools, Cedars-Sinai partners with the City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks to offer free exercise programs to community members in local parks during the summer. Cedars-Sinai also collaborates with community-based organizations like the Los Angeles Urban League to provide the Healthy Habits Grocery Store Tour Program, a series of four workshops that teaches adults how to shop healthier on a budget. The Grocery Store Tour Program is held at the local supermarket where participants put into practice what they learned. These partnerships move Healthy Habits beyond the classroom and into the community.

For organizations launching similar programs, listening and responding to partners is vital to growing strong and sustainable partnerships, and to overcoming obstacles to change. As Buenaflor says, "School policies and cultures around celebrations and using food as rewards are slow to change. Cedars-Sinai's role in promoting policies for healthier school environments is challenging and complicated, but our program evaluation shows we are making significant progress."

### **Key Considerations**

- *Message "layering" promotes continuity in health education.*
- *Growing partnerships requires listening and responding to partners.*

Healthy Habits instructor Sunny Hu shows a community member how to read and compare labels as part of the Grocery Store Tour program. Image reproduced with permission from Cedar Sinai Medical Center's Healthy Habits Program.

### **Healthy Habits Program Key Messages**

- **Eat smart!**  
*Always read and compare food labels.*
- **Stay Active together!**  
*Enjoy physical activity as a family.*
- **Practice portions.**  
*Pay attention to serving sizes.*
- **Keep it low.**  
*Choose foods low in fat and sugars for a healthy heart.*
- **Enjoy your treats,**  
*just eat less of them.*
- **Every step counts on the road to health.**  
*Start by adding one fruit to your breakfast or taking short walk after dinner.*

**Every step towards being healthier counts.**

