New York

Establishing a Community Coalition to Prevent Diabetes in East Harlem by Educating and Empowering Residents to Improve Their Nutrition

Public Health Problem

In New York, East Harlem's residents, who are 50% Latino and 40% African American, are faced with limited resources and a disproportionate burden of chronic diseases, such as diabetes. Compared with people in New York City, East Harlem residents have the highest prevalence of obesity, and nearly double the prevalence of diabetes (14.9%) vs. New York City overall (7.9%). One effective way to treat and prevent diabetes and related complications is to consume foods containing carbohydrates from whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and low-fat milk.

Program Example

The New York State Diabetes Prevention and Control Program funds a community coalition for diabetes prevention in East Harlem (1 of 13 regional coalitions statewide). The Community Advances in Nutrition for Diabetes through Education and Empowerment coalition, with leadership from the Mt. Sinai School of Medicine, includes community-based organizations, advocates, health care providers, and researchers. One of the coalition's foremost community-based participatory research projects has been the completion of a food availability survey of local grocery stores and "bodegas" (small Hispanic grocery stores) to document the availability and cost of foods recommended for people with diabetes in East Harlem compared with the more affluent neighboring Upper East Side neighboring community.

Implications and Impact

Survey results indicate a lack of basic low-fat, high-fiber, low-carbohydrate, and low-calorie food items in East Harlem (18% of survey foods available) compared with the Upper East Side (58% of survey foods available). The disparities in food availability could be a barrier to diabetes self-management. Data from this community-based participatory research will help clinicians and community leaders educate their constituents and capitalize on local assets to devise strategies that improve food availability. Future activities include plans to evaluate whether differences in food availability are due to supply or demand and how availability correlates with food consumption and diabetes control.

Contact Information

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