

Washington



Involving Communities When Planning for Prevention

Public Health Problem

Nearly 60% of adults in Washington are either overweight or obese. The obesity rate among adults has increased by 127% from 1990 through 2002. More than one in five of Washington's high school students were overweight or at risk for becoming overweight in 1999.

Program Example

Washington's Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Prevention Program addresses the obesity and overweight problem on multiple levels: individual, interpersonal, institutional and organizational, community, and public policy. Washington began its initiative by empowering a community to decide how it wanted to make its environment healthier. To develop policy and environmental efforts that promote nutrition and physical activity, the Washington Department of Health focused on Moses Lake, a small community in rural Washington. The health department convened experts to provide input into a state action plan that called for promoting good nutrition and physical activity through policy and environmental approaches. The health department and its partners, National Park Service and the University of Washington, then worked in the community to mobilize a group of citizens, organizations, and businesses to form the Healthy Communities Moses Lake Advisory Committee. The committee identified three priority projects from the state action plan and created a Healthy Communities Moses Lake Action Plan to Promote Nutrition and Physical Activity. The projects have included community gardens; support for breastfeeding; and creation of a series of paths for exercise, recreation, transportation, and tourism.

Implications and Impact

Washington's efforts to build its capacity have shown how the process of community mobilization can activate members of a community to address nutrition and physical activity issues. Washington's experiences also illustrate that community members from different disciplines can work together to address community health and attract other state-based groups to invest in the community.