



Applying Proven Methods to Increase Heart-Healthy Behaviors

Public Health Problem

In Ohio, rates of death caused by chronic diseases are among the highest in the nation. Rates of tobacco use, obesity, poor dietary habits, and lack of physical activity—all risk factors for chronic diseases—are also high in this state. Eighty-three percent of Ohio adults reported having at least one modifiable risk factor for cardiovascular disease, and nearly 80% reported having two or more modifiable risk factors. Data from the state's 2000 Behavioral Risk Factor Survey indicate that nearly 79% of people in Ohio have poor dietary habits, 60% have a sedentary lifestyle, more than 26% smoke cigarettes, and nearly 22% are obese.

Program Example

Healthy Ohioans, funded in part by Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant funds, is a statewide health and wellness program that addresses lifestyle risk factors such as obesity, tobacco use, and lack of physical activity. The program uses proven social marketing methods to identify high-need communities: those communities that have heart disease death rates significantly higher than the national average and high concentrations of residents living in poverty. For example, 7 urban projects have populations of more than 250,000 and substantial numbers of impoverished people. In addition, 14 rural and suburban regional projects cover a total of 35 counties, including 22 high-need counties. Health communication tools and principles are used to disseminate health messages that encourage healthy behaviors by creating awareness, changing attitudes, and motivating individuals to adopt recommended behaviors.

Implications and Impact

The Heart Health project is one of the most successful projects within the Healthy Ohioans program. In 2003, the program reached 21 projects and covered 42 counties. As a result of the Heart Health project, seven communities have established new walking paths. One community has reclaimed and opened an urban park that had been closed for 20 years. A unique barbershop program in inner-city Cleveland targeting African American men has trained barbers to talk with customers about high blood pressure. Screenings are held monthly for barbershop patrons. The barbershops and the Heart Health messages were promoted to Cleveland residents via 361 media spots. In northwest Ohio, Henry County has established a partnership with a local food vending machine company that covers 11 counties and 100 work sites. The vendor has labeled appropriate items with 5 A Day or Heart Healthy stickers. To date, sales of the 5 A Day items have increased by 15% and the Heart Healthy items by 80%.