
MODELS FOR PRACTICE

FOCUS AREA: EDUCATIONAL AND COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS

Program Name: Healthy U of Delmarva

Location: Salisbury, Maryland

Problem Addressed: Educational and Community-Based Programs

Healthy People 2010 Objective: 7

Web Address: www.healthyudelmarva.org

SNAPSHOT

Healthy U of Delmarva, together with over 170 community partners, serves three rural counties on Maryland's lower eastern shore, known as the Tri-County region. The main economic contributors are the poultry, seafood, and farm industries. The unemployment rate for this area (7.2 percent) is twice as high as the state average (3.5 percent), and the median income (\$34,000) is dramatically lower than the state's median income (\$53,700). A rapid population shift is occurring in the Tri-County region, with large increases in the percentage of African Americans, Latinos, Asians, and Haitians who have migrated to this area from other parts of the United States or from other countries.

The program emphasizes healthy lifestyle choice.

This model was developed to address the high incidence of diabetes and other chronic diseases that often result from poor lifestyle choices. It focuses on enrolling residents into community programs that will improve their health and reduce the risks associated with unhealthy lifestyles. Healthy U of Delmarva is a comprehensive, multi-factoral program that communicates a consistent message about the risks of smoking and the benefits of a healthy diet, regular physical activity, and preventive health screenings at places of work, schools, houses of worship, public buildings, and in the media.

THE MODEL

Blueprint: Healthy U of Delmarva is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with over 170 community partners. All of the original stakeholders still play an active part in Healthy U of Delmarva operations. There are five paid staff members and over 500 active volunteers, while another 500 volunteers act as "community resource personnel." It is operated through a private endowment fund administered in part by the Community Foundation of the Lower Eastern Shore. Expansion projects and programs are funded through grant awards, and some community partners have committed to providing existing in-kind services for a five-year period.

As an incentive-based program, Healthy U of Delmarva rewards participants for their healthy behaviors. Throughout the year, community members can earn entries into monthly drawings by participating in various health-

promoting events, such as a walking club, exercise classes, health lectures, and smoking cessation classes. One of the largest incentives that Healthy U of Delmarva offers is the chance to win the campaign's grand prize, which was a new car in 2003 and a Harley Davidson motorcycle in 2004. Participants are eligible for this annual drawing once they have had their body mass index (BMI) measured—at baseline and 12 months later.

To overcome the barriers associated with cost, local providers of exercise and health-related services provide deeply discounted rates to Healthy U of Delmarva participants. This model recognizes that some community members will still not be able to afford such services and offers fitness scholarships to these individuals. Many restaurants, home fitness equipment stores, and recreation parks also offer discounted prices to anyone who has a Healthy U membership card.

Healthy U of Delmarva also strives to include workplaces, faith-based organizations, educational institutions, area non-profits, and governmental bodies into its program by recognizing organizations that have done outstanding work in promoting long-term healthy lifestyle changes among their members. Currently, 96 organizations are enrolled to compete for a \$5,000 prize in one of five respective categories. This program, dubbed "Healthy U HUEY Awards," is an incentive for businesses and other community organizations to engage in a creative self-directed health promotion program that fosters teamwork and camaraderie among its members.

Healthy U of Delmarva also offers software to community members who are seeking guidance toward better health. The Healthy U Diet and Exercise Private Tutor is a comprehensive, sensible program that helps users integrate healthy eating and exercise into their daily routines.

Making a Difference: To measure the effectiveness of Healthy U of Delmarva, the participants' height, weight, waist, and hip measurements are taken at baseline. The participants also answer a series of questions about their diet, exercise, smoking habits, personal goals, and health-related knowledge. After 12 months, all participants have the same measurements taken and are asked the same questions. Health researchers compare the new information with the previous information to determine how Healthy U of Delmarva has impacted the community. This information also helps with program modification, expansion, and delivery. Initial results have shown an average 5 percent reduction in weight, 6 percent reduction in body mass index, and 7 percent reduction in waist circumference among the program participants.

Healthy U of Delmarva communicates and markets to the community through its website, as well as through the local media—television, radio, and newspaper. The program also provides coalition partners with materials to disseminate, such as flyers and brochures. Of the nearly 6,000 participants who signed up for the initial registration in 2003, over half returned for their

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one-year survey and to re-register for the 2004 campaign. In addition, over 1,000 new participants signed up to participate in the program. In the short-term, Healthy U of Delmarva expects to see improvements in knowledge and modest weight and/or BMI reduction among the participants. Desired long-term outcomes include making positive changes in the rates of morbidity and mortality associated with diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer.

Beginnings: A community assessment in 2000 showed that the residents of this region were at significant risk for chronic diseases due to lifestyle-related choices. When compared with the residents of the United States as a whole, a larger percentage of the Tri-County population consumes a high-fat diet (10.4 and 13.6 percent, respectively), is obese (19 and 23.6 percent, respectively), and has high cholesterol (21 and 26 percent, respectively).

Healthy U of Delmarva was founded by a community leader, Mitzi Perdue, with input from other local leaders to encourage the community to prevent chronic disease by making lifestyle improvements. The program began in July 2002 and was fully implemented by January 2003.

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Challenges and Solutions: One major challenge at the introduction of the program was the doubt that existed among community members and leaders. They did not believe that such a comprehensive program involving the entire community could be successful. The key to overcoming this challenge was for the program leaders to remain resolute and believe in the project and its mission.

The rapidly increasing numbers of migrating minorities presents Healthy U of Delmarva with a new set of challenges. One challenge is the high risk these populations have for juvenile obesity. For this reason, the organization has begun to focus some additional efforts on the children in the community. Expansion plans include creating “Healthy Kids U,” based on the original Healthy U model. This model, a five-year expansion effort, will build on existing services and programs within the three-county area.

In its first year of operation, Healthy U of Delmarva received Maryland’s “Outstanding Rural Health Program of 2003” sponsored by the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Maryland Office of Rural Health, and the Rural Maryland Council. It also received the Maryland Medical Society President’s Award for “Outstanding Contributions to Bettering the Health of Maryland’s Citizens.”

PROGRAM CONTACT INFORMATION

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