

## **PARTNERSHIP FOR HEART-HEALTHY, STROKE-FREE MASSACHUSETTS**

### **How to Build an Effective Cross-Organizational Coalition**

#### **ABOUT:**

The Partnership for a Heart-Healthy, Stroke-Free Massachusetts is a statewide coalition of organizations dedicated to promoting optimal health by preventing and reducing heart disease and stroke, responding rapidly when heart attack or stroke occurs, and improving healthcare systems in Massachusetts.

#### **GOAL:**

Promote optimal health through changing physical and social environments, public policies, and healthcare systems to reduce risk for heart disease and stroke for all residents of Massachusetts.

#### **HOW TO:**

In 2001, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention and Control Program, the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association, and the Massachusetts Peer Review Organization came together to co-sponsor the Massachusetts Cardiovascular Health Coalition, a predecessor planning effort to the Partnership. The goal of the Coalition was to devise strategies to reduce illness and death related to heart disease and stroke among Massachusetts residents. Members included organizations, agencies, and individuals with a key stake in the success of a statewide effort to prevent and control heart disease and stroke, including health providers, state and local health department officials, community-based organizations, schools, and community members.

Between 2001 and 2004 the Coalition accomplished numerous essential planning activities that laid the groundwork for the Partnership. The Coalition created goals; galvanized support among key stakeholders; collected and analyzed data from health providers, worksites, and communities; and formed task groups. These efforts resulted in the publication of a comprehensive action plan called *The Health of Massachusetts: A Coordinated Response to Heart Disease and Stroke*. This document increased awareness and shared recommendations for reducing heart disease and stroke in Massachusetts with clear objectives and measurable outcomes. In 2004 this comprehensive action plan was officially distributed and the Coalition formally became the Partnership for a Heart-Healthy, Stroke-Free Massachusetts. Initial members were elected for the Executive Committee in 2005, and the following year a part-time Coordinator was hired to handle day-to-day activities and to support the standing committees.

Today, the Partnership is committed to changing social environments, public policies, and healthcare systems to reduce risk for heart-disease and stroke through two sets of structured activities:

1. Member meetings – The Partnership holds annual educational conferences and annual business meetings with the purposes of:
  - connecting work of local providers and organizations to reduce duplication and identify gaps.
  - facilitating the sharing of best and promising practices.
  - improving access to education on aspects of heart disease and stroke.
  - advocating for positive policy, systems, and environmental change.
  - synthesizing and disseminating relevant information.
  - working to eliminate health disparities.
2. Executive Committee meetings – A core set of Partner organizations meets monthly to monitor progress toward goals, plan events, and cultivate new members. This ensures an active, growing organization that meets the needs of its membership.

In addition, a website is being developed that will allow member organizations to post their activities related to the prevention and treatment of heart disease and stroke.

#### **BUDGET:**

In 2001, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention and Control Program was awarded funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to build capacity and improve collaboration in Massachusetts for heart disease and stroke prevention. That funding, in part, supported the formation of the original Coalition. In addition to current financial contributions from member organizations in the form of event registration fees, the Partnership raises funds through grants and event sponsorships. Membership organizations also contribute in-kind contributions for specific events and activities.

#### **BEST PRACTICES:**

- **The whole is greater than the sum of all its parts: Coordination:** The Partnership is a coordinated assault on chronic disease. By partnering with other chronic disease coalitions in Massachusetts, the effect is a sweeping, statewide effort to combat chronic disease. For example, the Partnership for Healthy Weight's plan focuses primarily on healthy eating and an active lifestyle, while the Partnership's plan concentrates on identifying people at risk; strengthening emergency response to heart attack and stroke; and getting people timely treatment. These two plans direct their efforts along varying points on the continuum of prevention to intervention, thus having a much greater impact.
- **Communication:** Improve communications pathways in order to link partner organizations, share accomplishments, disseminate evidence-based practices, identify emerging needs and trends, exchange ideas and strategies.
- **Membership:** Build a broad, actively engaged membership with diverse regional constituent representation
- **Advocacy and Policy:** Engage and mobilize members on key public policy agenda
- **Health Disparities:** Incorporate the elimination of health disparities as an essential focus of all education, policy, and membership activities
- **Fiscal Viability:** Establish a fiscally viable partnership through diverse, abundant, and sustainable revenue streams. Keep in mind the value of other types of contribution such as staff and other in-kind support.

#### **OVERALL LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Require regular meetings of the leadership for joint planning, coordination, and budget oversight.
- Cultivate engagement in the organization's activities by leadership team and by members.
- Develop clear goals and member roles from the outset. Keep goals and objectives realistic and attainable.
- Conduct annual reviews to determine strengths, resources, and challenges.
- Value the networking opportunities brought about by having a diverse membership group. The accomplishments of other member organizations creates synergies and can inspire and energize others.
- Share resources to avoid duplicating efforts.
- In order to effectively combat chronic disease, it is necessary to address and promote change at all levels of influence including: worksites, communities, healthcare, schools, and public policy.

#### **CONTACT:**

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