

HEALTHY EATING, ACTIVING LIVING (HEAL) PROGRAM

The Foundation for Healthy Communities (FHC), New Hampshire

ABOUT:

HEAL (Healthy Eating Active Living) aims to foster implementation of effective interventions to promote healthy eating and active living, resulting in positive and demonstrable impact on health and quality of life.

GOAL:

In 2004, the Board of Directors of the *HNHfoundation*, a private New Hampshire Foundation, voted to focus a portion of its grant-making on the prevention of childhood obesity. However, at the time, there were few studies that could provide funders across the nation with a list of best practices to fund in their states. New Hampshire had the additional handicap of not having a statewide plan to address childhood obesity, which left the *HNHfoundation* and others in the state working on this issue with little guidance and few opportunities for coordination among prospective partners. In the fall of 2006, in an effort to broaden its impact on this issue, the *HNHfoundation* convened a small group of partners to determine their level of commitment to developing a healthy eating and active living plan for all New Hampshire residents, not just children.

HOW TO:

Having established support for the project, the *HNHfoundation* recruited additional “convening partners” based on their commitment to provide financial resources and/or technical assistance and expertise to support a statewide obesity prevention planning and implementation process. The 14 HEAL convening partners represented philanthropy, state agencies and regional obesity prevention efforts.

In April 2007, the convening partners hired the Community Health Institute (CHI), a non-profit New Hampshire organization, to facilitate the creation of a statewide plan to address obesity. CHI provided guidance in establishing a Steering Committee and forming work groups to provide input into the development of the HEAL Action Plan. The draft plan was presented to nearly 200 stakeholders at a statewide conference in October 2007. Feedback was solicited for each of the interventions within the six HEAL Action Plan sectors—schools, health care industry, communities and municipalities, businesses and worksites, food and recreation industries, and individuals and families. The *HEAL Action Plan for New Hampshire*, developed by 34 members of the Steering Committee, was published in March 2008. An electronic version of the Action Plan can be found at:
<http://www.healnh.org/StatewideInitiative/HealActionPlan/>.

The HEAL Action Plan implementation strategy, a blueprint to achieve success of the overarching HEAL Initiative, includes:

- Establish a statewide “HEAL Home” or organization to lead the HEAL Initiative and oversee implementation of the Action Plan
- Develop a community grant program to support implementation of HEAL across all sectors at the state and local level
- Institute a partner program to engage and recognize organizations that commit to and successfully implement the HEAL Action Plan recommendations

The Foundation for Healthy Communities (FHC), a not-for-profit organization with a mission to improve health and health care delivery in New Hampshire, was selected as the HEAL Home. FHC hired a HEAL Director in July 2008. Implementation of the HEAL Initiative began at this time.

BUDGET:

Private and corporate foundations committed \$450,000 to support the implementation strategy during the first year, with commitments confirmed by many of the foundations for additional years of funding. An additional \$1.9 million of funding was secured by the NH Department of Health Services through a five-year Cooperative Agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to support HEAL Action Plan implementation.

BARRIERS:

- **Capacity of funding, partners and staff:** While there are big plans in place, not everything can get done with the current availability of funding and human resources. Prioritizing action is necessary so the HEAL Home can respond to and address key areas of need.
- **Providing technical assistance to communities:** HEAL has yet to find an efficient and responsive approach to providing TA to both community grant program recipients, as well as other “just starting up” communities and organizations, within the constraints of current capacity.
- **Appropriate evaluation:** Limited capacity also means that realistic strategies must be identified for developing and implementing a HEAL evaluation plan.
- **Communication:** Communication Plan activities must be prioritized to provide the most visibility and action as a result of HEAL communication efforts. An important element to be addressed through communication resources is the development of carefully crafted HEAL messaging to convey the proper emphasis on policy and environmental change to all targeted sectors and age groups. The message must be disseminated at both the state and local levels.

HEAL has requested and will receive assistance through the national HEAL Convergence Partnership to conduct a capacity needs assessment to address the referenced barriers.

BEST PRACTICES:

- **Utilize existing relationships.** In creating the original HEAL steering committee, the *HNHfoundation* used existing contacts with funding partners—such as Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Foundation and the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation—and state agencies—such as the Department of Education, Parks and Recreation Department and the Department of Transportation—to involve a wide range of contributors beyond public health professionals.
- **Consult with organizations with similar programs.** In order to create a realistic, sustainable program, consult with experienced national programs such as the national HEAL Convergence Partnership or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and successful state programs such as *Eat Smart, Move More North Carolina* before creating an action plan. Learn what works and what doesn’t work from those who have been there before.
- **Be realistic about funding and staffing capacity.** Define the top program goals and prioritize each action by its impact on progress toward these goals. This will keep your resources working on the most impactful actions.
- **Create realistic evaluation strategies using readily available tools and resources.** While HEAL could spend millions delving into conducting research on the impact of its interventions on population health, it is focusing its evaluation resources on measuring process outcomes such as how effectively community grantees implement their proposed work plans and the amount of tools and resources accessed through the HEAL website. The focus is on implementation. The HEAL Action Plan recommended interventions are evidence-based or promising practices. HEAL’s leadership trusts that those implementing the interventions are having a positive impact

on the populations they serve. Even so, HEAL has developed a surveillance plan and is relying on its partner, the NH Department of Health and Human Services to carry out this higher-level of evaluation using existing tools such as the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBS).

OVERALL LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Focus on policy and environment.** To promote healthy eating and active living, the focus should be on policy and environmental change rather than targeting individual change. This is the best way to “make the healthy choice the easy choice”.
- **Obtain cross-sector representation.** Throughout its convening, Action Plan development and now during implementation, HEAL has engaged partners from all five of its target sectors (Schools, Health Care Industry, Communities and Municipalities, Businesses and Worksites, and Food and Recreation Industries). Cross-sector representation provides HEAL with expert input and buy-in at all levels of the program.

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