A Community Health Assessment for Policy Change to Support Healthy Living in Harford County

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Project Overview

- Strategic planning and policy research for obesity prevention
- The Health Information Trends Survey for Harford County
Obesity: A Public Health Challenge

- More than one-third of U.S. adults – 72 million people – and 17 percent of U.S. children are obese.\(^1,2\)
- Overweight and obesity are linked with serious health issues: coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes, cancers, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, arthritis, and stroke.
- If current trends continue, it is projected that one in three children born in the United States will develop diabetes.\(^3\)

Researchers predict that this generation of American children may be the first in two centuries to have a less healthy, shorter lifespan than their parents.\(^4\)
An Opportunity for Local Government Action

“... local governments – with jurisdiction over many aspects of land use, food marketing, community planning, transportation, health and nutrition programs, and other community issues – are ideally positioned to promote behaviors that will help children and adolescents reach and maintain healthy weights.” Institute of Medicine, Sept 2009
Obesity Trends in Harford County

- From 2000 to 2005, the proportion of obese adults (BMI ≥ 30) in Harford County increased from 26% to 32%.\(^6\)

- In Maryland, from 2000 to 2003, the obesity rate among adults (ages 18 or older) went from 20.2% to 21.9%.\(^7\)

- In 2005, about 17.8% of adults in Harford County reported that one or more of their children was overweight.\(^8\)
Community Health Assessment

- Since 1993, the Harford County Health Department has been involved in Healthy Harford, Inc., a non-profit org.

- Healthy Harford brings together a diverse group of community leaders who work collaboratively “to make Harford County the healthiest community in Maryland.”

- Over the past two years, Healthy Harford has been conducting a comprehensive community assessment.
  - Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey
  - Walkability/Bikeability Assessments
  - Community Health Assessment Project (CHAP) 2010
Strategic Planning Sessions

Dec. 2010: Healthy Harford Board met to discuss assessment results and local challenges.

March 2011: Healthy Harford Board met for a strategic planning session focusing on obesity prevention. Goals and priorities were suggested.

Spring 2011: A subcommittee has been developing specific policy recommendations to bring back to the Board.

→ Built Environment
→ Access to Healthy Foods
→ School/Children’s Activities
→ Food and Beverage Industry
Policy Research: Best Practices and Models

- In 2005, Montgomery County, MD approved a Countywide Bikeways Functional Master Plan.

- In 2010, Howard County, MD adopted a vending policy to provide healthy options in vending machines in public areas. Howard County also has a “Healthy Restaurant” initiative.

- In 2010, Jefferson County, AL passed a resolution to create a local food policy council that would lead efforts to address barriers to healthy food access.

- In 2011, Santa Clara County, CA passed a resolution to become a “Let’s Move! County.”

- In 2007, King County, WA passed a resolution supporting policies to promote healthy eating and active living.
Policy Research: Lessons

- Menu labeling regulations
  - In November 2009, Montgomery County passed a resolution requiring food service establishments with 20 or more locations nationwide to display calories.
  - In January 2010, Metropolitan Board of Health (Tennessee) deferred a menu labeling regulation in anticipation of federal regulations.
  - It is important to consider the federal menu labeling requirements (Section 4205 of the Affordable Care Act).

- In 2010, two resolutions targeting obesity were not passed by the Board of Supervisors in Yuba County, California.
Lessons Learned & Implications for Public Health Practice

- Community health assessments drove the planning and policy process.
- It was critical for goals and recommendations to be generated by the stakeholders.
- Engaging a diverse group of community leaders was important for the strategic planning process.
- It was helpful to consider what other counties are doing.
- Participants emphasized the need to increase community awareness.
Health Information Trends Survey

It has become increasingly challenging to know where people obtain health and medical information, and how to reach individuals with relevant health messages and resources.

Goals and Objectives:

- To identify the information sources that Harford County residents use to look for health and medical information
- To better reach county residents with health messages and resources by using optimal communication channels
Health Information Trends Survey

Methods:
- 19 questions based on existing questions from the CHAP 2010 survey, HINTS, and Mobile Health 2010
- Offered in-person at county venues and online
- Where data has been collected:
  March for Babies Walk-a-thon, Grace Memorial Church, Earth Day Celebration at Aberdeen Festival Park, Title One Parent Conference, Bel Air Farmers’ Market, Harford Community College

Lessons Learned:
- There are benefits to using existing survey questions
- The IRB process can take longer than expected
Health Information Solutions:
Targeting Audiences & Expanding Reach

If it is found that county residents use the library...
A health information kiosk

If it is found that county residents use the Internet...
Consider ways to widely advertise the Healthy Harford website

If it is found that county residents use mobile phones...
An “app” with local information
A special thanks to...

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References