



## Promoting Physical Activity and Nutrition in an American Indian Community

Since the mid-1970s, obesity has increased sharply in the United States. According to 2003-2004 data, 33% of U.S. adults are obese. Chronic diseases and obesity are problems for all facets of the U.S. population, including the American Indian community. In 2005, 37% of adults in the Cherokee Nation (a consortium of eight American Indian tribes) were overweight, and 27% were obese, according to a Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System survey conducted by CDC's Steps Program.

Research shows that exercising regularly, eating a healthy diet, and not using tobacco can help people prevent and manage chronic conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and some cancers. One important way CDC is responding to the overweight and obesity problem is by funding Steps to a Healthier Cherokee Nation. Through a five-year cooperative agreement, CDC's Steps Program provides technical assistance, training, evaluation, and dissemination support to Steps to a Healthier Cherokee Nation, which implements community-level health promotion strategies that have been successful in changing people's lives.

At one point, Westville, Oklahoma resident Marcella Morton was 60 pounds overweight, never exercised, lived on junk food, and only drank sugared sodas. Motivated to improve her health after losing a friend to

cancer, Morton began a walking program—beginning with just 15 minutes a day—and eventually became a regular marathon runner who ran the Boston Marathon. She also adopted new eating habits, replacing junk food snacks with fresh fruits and vegetables. Morton praises Steps to a Healthier Cherokee Nation for providing local activities that enabled her to improve her health, as well as educate others in her community.



Activities sponsored by CDC's Steps to a Healthier Cherokee Nation enabled Morton to continue her own quest for health and teach others. Since 2002, Morton has been actively involved in the Steps Wings Program, which provides education and resources to help residents live healthier lifestyles. As a volunteer, she teaches yoga classes and trains others to exercise safely and properly. Well-known and respected in her community, Morton's participation helped raise the profile of Steps activities and messages. Through the Steps Program, CDC reached scores of American Indians in this community who were inspired by Morton's personal success.

Steps to a Healthier Cherokee Nation is one of three federally recognized tribal groups directly funded through CDC's Steps Program. The Steps Program also funds two American Indian tribes through the Washington and Arizona state health departments. To learn more about successes in the Steps Program, go to: [www.cdc.gov/steps/success\\_stories/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/steps/success_stories/index.htm).



For more information about CDC at Work, please contact us at (202) 245-0600 or go to <http://www.cdc.gov/washington/>