

Massachusetts

Tailored Strategies Help Latinos Improve Diabetes Outcomes

Producing Results

Culturally tailored interventions improved control of blood sugar and high blood pressure levels and improved quality of care among Latinos with diabetes. Blood sugar measures improved by nearly 9%, systolic blood pressure improved by almost 18%, and diastolic blood pressure improved by over 14%. The proportion of diabetic patients referred for eye exams improved by more than 26%, and the number of patients whose smoking status was reviewed more than doubled.

Public Health Problem

The Greater Lawrence Family Health Center (GLFHC) in Massachusetts reported that diabetes prevalence is 7.4% among Latinos statewide, compared with only 6.4% among non-Hispanic whites. Specifically, the prevalence of diabetes among Puerto Ricans and Dominican adults in Lawrence is 11.8%, nearly twice the rate among whites in Massachusetts.

Taking Action

The REACH Latino Health Project works to raise people's awareness about diabetes, teach community members to eat a healthy diet and be more physically active, and help members understand that diabetes can be prevented and controlled. The project provides education, social support, and community collaboration within the Latino community to reduce this group's high rate of diabetes. To accomplish this, the project incorporates culturally-sensitive and linguistically-appropriate information on how to prevent and manage diabetes. Additionally, the project leads outreach activities through a local health education center, and, by working with community groups, partners with local health care providers to promote health messages. The REACH Latino Health Project relies on existing relationships among Latino populations and community groups in Lawrence to promote community wellness. These relationships can provide the foundation to create the health care support needed to improve health outcomes and to encourage more people to use diabetes prevention services.

Implications and Impact

Data from Latino residents with diabetes who are patients of the Greater Lawrence Family Health Center show dramatic improvements in control of high blood glucose and cholesterol levels. In 2006, blood sugar levels improved from an average of 8.21 to 7.67 among participants in "Winning with Diabetes", a 10-week educational program at the Lawrence Senior Center. Also, in 2006, the percentage of participants with total cholesterol levels <200 mg/dL (the clinical cutoff point) increased from 75% to 80%. The percentage of Latinos receiving services at the Greater Lawrence Family Health Center who had their blood sugar level measured at least twice a year as recommended increased from just over 50% in 2002 to nearly 62% in 2006 after the center took specific steps to improve the health of its Latino clients with diabetes. The percentage of Latinos receiving services at the GLFHC who reached their blood sugar goal (A1c level <7) increased from almost 21% in 2002 to nearly 44% in 2006. The percentage of Latinos receiving services at the GLFHC who had an annual flu shot increased from 44% in 2005 to 55% in 2006. These successes were achieved by engaging the Latino community in Lawrence and substantially involving its members in community education and outreach to promote diabetes prevention and control.