

The Steps Program in Willmar, Minnesota

Funding Period: 2004–2009

CDC's Steps Program funds states, cities, and tribal groups to implement community-based chronic disease prevention programs to reduce the burden of obesity, diabetes, and asthma by addressing three related risk factors: physical inactivity, poor nutrition, and tobacco use. Steps-funded programs are showing what can be done locally in schools, work sites, communities, and health care settings to promote healthier lifestyles and help people make long-lasting and sustainable changes that can reduce their risk for chronic diseases.

Background

Willmar, a regional center in west-central Minnesota, is located approximately 100 miles west of the Twin Cities and is the Kandiyohi County seat. With fewer than 25,000 residents, it is the smallest Steps community in the state. Willmar has the third-largest Hispanic and Latino population in Minnesota and a fast-growing Somali population. Approximately 13% of children in the Willmar Public Schools district are in families living below the federal poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau estimate, 2005), and 45% of the district's students, most of them in elementary school, receive free or reduced-price meals. Steps program efforts focus on residents at greatest risk for chronic conditions, including racial and ethnic minority groups and people living below the federal poverty level.

Spotlight on Success

- The Willmar Steps Program promoted the Willmar Public Schools (WPS) wellness policy as a model throughout Minnesota, and the University of Mississippi featured it in a national case study on wellness policy development. The Willmar Steps Program also promoted physical activity in classrooms at eight different school sites by providing pedometers and implementing the SMART (Stimulating Maturity through Accelerated Readiness Training) program.
- The Willmar Steps Program provided asthma-control resources to eight school nurses and supports training for asthma-care professionals and child care providers. The Steps Program also provides asthma education for minority populations, who are often at high risk for this disease, by using a language-specific community television program on asthma for Somali and Spanish speakers and arranging for speakers and interpreters.
- The Willmar Steps Program assisted employers throughout the community in planning and setting up work-site wellness programs; participation ranged from 10 to more than 100 employees at the various sites. During these programs, employees met with or attended presentations by Steps staff members and received incentives and educational materials that included nutrition tips and physical activity logs.

Community Partnerships

Willmar has a long history of community collaboration and partnership activities. Given the small population, many agencies and organizations must work together to share audiences and available resources. Partners in the Willmar Steps Program not only help plan and implement Steps programs, but are also encouraged to share information about their other activities. These partners include the YMCA, health care providers, parks and recreation departments, schools, businesses, health-related coalitions, faith-based communities, communications media, and local and state government agencies and programs.

Contact

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