

The Steps Program in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania

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

Luzerne County, located in Northeastern Pennsylvania, is a mix of urban and rural communities that have struggled economically since the decline of the coal and garment industries in the 1950s. The population of 319,250 is primarily non-Hispanic white; less than 2% of residents are non-Hispanic black, and just over 1% is Hispanic or Latino. However, the Hispanic or Latino population's growth rate has been cited as the fourth most rapid among U.S. counties, and the resident population is characterized by rich ethnic and religious diversity. Almost 20% of county residents are 65 or older. The median household income is \$37,295; nearly 13% of county residents live below the federal poverty level (2005 U.S. Census Bureau estimates), almost 6% are unemployed, and 11% have no health insurance. Rates of diabetes, asthma, heart disease, obesity, and smoking-related chronic diseases are higher in Luzerne County than in the state overall. There are more than 49,200 students enrolled in 64 public schools in the county's 11 school districts; 38% of these students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. National averages and newly released obesity rates show that more than 30% of the county's children in kindergarten through fourth grade have BMIs in the 85th percentile or greater.

Spotlight on Success

Luzerne County's Steps Program partnered with a local television station to create public service announcements and other programming that shows people how small changes in nutrition and physical activity can help prevent many chronic conditions, including obesity, diabetes, and asthma. This partnership has almost doubled viewer exposure to health and active lifestyle messages, and sponsor donations that cover production and airtime costs have leveraged Steps funding by 600%. Read this success story in *The Steps Program in Action*, available at www.cdc.gov/steps/success_stories/pdf/luzerne.pdf.

Community Partnerships

The Steps Program is bringing together a number of local-area health coalitions to begin the development of a countywide community wellness consortium. Members of many separate work groups have met together twice since 2005, first for a visioning retreat and then for a follow-up planning and skills-building retreat. These work groups include more than 100 individuals from approximately 60 organizations, agencies, colleges and universities, health care systems and insurance plans, chambers of commerce, churches, school districts, government agencies, and businesses.

Contact

Steps to a Healthier PA—Luzerne County
Northeast Pennsylvania Area Health Education Center
Telephone: 570-945-5623
www.stepstohealthierluzernecounty.org